

# **Baptistic Theologies**

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## **Publication – Twice a year**

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Postjesweg 175, 1062 JN Amsterdam, The Netherlands  
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ISSN 1803 – 618X

## **Subscriptions**

International Baptist Theological Study Centre  
Postjesweg 175, 1062 JN Amsterdam, The Netherlands  
<http://www.ibts.eu> | [journal@ibts.eu](mailto:journal@ibts.eu) | +31-20-2103025  
This journal is also available through EBSCO and Harrassowitz.

Cover design by Thought Collective, Belfast, Northern Ireland  
<http://www.thoughtcollective.com> | [hello@thoughtcollective.com](mailto:hello@thoughtcollective.com)

## **Electronic access**

This journal is indexed in the *ATLA Religion Database*® and it is also included in the full-text *ATLASerials*® (*ATLAS*®) collection.

Both are products of the  
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## 2017 Hughey Lectures

Wednesday 18 January 2017

NB Change of time

first lecture 9:30-10:45, coffee 10:45-11:15, second lecture 11:15-12:30

### Dr Ian M. Randall

Ian M. Randall is a Senior Research Fellow of IBTSC Amsterdam and Research Associate of the Cambridge Centre for Christianity Worldwide. He is the author of numerous books, including *The English Baptists of the Twentieth Century* (2005), *Rhythms of Revival: The Spiritual Awakening of 1857-1863* (2010), and a study of the Bruderhof Community's spirituality – *Church Community is a Gift of the Holy Spirit* (2014). He will deliver two lectures on the theme of 'Baptist and Anabaptist Peace Witness: From the First to the Second World Wars'.

#### Lecture 1

English Baptists and  
the Peace Movement

#### Lecture 2

An Anabaptist  
Witness: the  
Bruderhof Community



The event will take place in the Chapel of Tyndale Theological Seminary, Egelantierstraat 1, 1171 Badhoevedorp, Amsterdam.

**For further information contact David McMillan** [mcmillan@ibts.eu](mailto:mcmillan@ibts.eu)

While there is no charge for the lectures, those attending will be required to meet their own travel, accommodation, and subsistence costs in Amsterdam.

## **Contents**

<b>Editorial</b>	iv
<b>What Baptists have learned and still can learn from Luther in the doctrines of Justification and of the Church</b>	1
Uwe Swarat	
<b>Anabaptists and the Magisterial Reformation – the Question of Grace and Free Will with Particular Emphasis on the Danish Context</b>	16
Johannes Steenbuch	
<b>Faith and Art: Reforming Perspectives</b>	33
Graham Sparkes	
<b>‘An Intolerable Usurpation’: Theology and Practice of Ministry among Early Particular Baptists</b>	46
Ian Birch	
<b>Book Reviews</b>	61
Stuart Blythe, Toivo Pilli, Dorothy McMillan, and Ian Randall	

## Editorial

At the end of June 2016 a meeting took place at the Theologische Hochschule, Elstal of the Consortium of European Baptist Theological Schools (CEBTS). This is a group of theological schools related to the Baptist Unions in membership of the European Baptist Federation. It seeks to meet every two years. Historically the members of CEBTS have covenanted together as institutions committed to theological learning and mission within the Baptist tradition:

- To be bound to each other in mutual fellowship and support;
- To consult with and work with one another for the sake of the mission and glory of God;
- To develop good practice in theological education;
- To support one another in the delivery of academically recognised theological education for the whole people of God and relevant to Baptist communities;
- To work together in supporting the mission of our Baptist Unions within the European Baptist Federation family.

The theme of the conference in 2016 was ‘Celebrating the Reformation as European Baptists?’

The four substantial articles in this Journal were first presented and discussed at this conference and are published here after further revision and comment. As with the Conference itself, which included a number of additional presentations, the perspectives are varied and offer something of a discussion around the theme.

In the first article Uwe Swarat addresses the question of ‘What Baptists have learned and still can learn from Luther in the doctrines of Justification and of the Church’. As Swarat indicates at the beginning of his article, he seeks to avoid a straight ‘controversialist’ approach to this question and indeed offers a rather more sympathetic and ecumenical understanding of what Baptists have and can still learn from Luther. With respect to justification Swarat suggests that the simultaneous ‘saint-sinner’ dimension in Luther’s understanding of justification invites greater Baptist consideration than has been previously given, at least in Germany. In turn he goes on to argue that Baptists owe more to Luther’s ecclesiology than they may like to admit and that Luther’s doctrine of the priesthood is important because it ‘by no means stands in contradiction to the calling or ordaining of individual ministers’.

In the second article Johannes Steenbuch addresses the topic of ‘Anabaptists and the Magisterial Reformation – the Question of Grace and Free Will with Particular Emphasis on the Danish Context’. In this article Steenbuch discusses some of the significant theological differences between the magisterial and radical Reformation. In doing this, however, he also argues, at least from a Danish Baptist perspective, that, while there may be a contemporary desire to associate Baptist with the Anabaptist tradition of the sixteenth century, ‘the Baptist tradition should be seen as reflecting elements from both’. He contends that this perspective of Baptists being able as it were to embrace ‘Luther *and* Hubmaier’ allows for a proper appreciation of the Jubilee celebrations without any sense of betraying the Baptist tradition.

Graham Sparkes offers an interesting change of direction in his article ‘Faith and Art: Reforming Perspectives’. Indicating the far-ranging changes to the appearance of Christian art and architecture that resulted from the sixteenth-century Reformation, he argues that many Reformation traditions, including that of Baptists, have generally held deep suspicions about the presence of visual art in church buildings designed for worship. Sparkes attributes this suspicion, however, to the influence of Calvin on these traditions and argues that Luther had a different perspective on the significance of outer, external, and material images for the life of faith. In support of his argument he draws particular attention to the close relationship Luther had with the artist Lucas Cranach and the sign and function of the ‘Wittenberg Altarpiece’. As a consequence, he argues that, with more attention to a Lutheran emphasis, Baptists may learn to see again within the Reformed tradition.

Ian Birch, in his article “‘An Intolerable Usurpation’: Theology and Practice of Ministry among Early Particular Baptists’, discusses ‘the theology and practice of ministry in English Particular Baptist communities in the formative phase of their development from 1640-1660’. He begins by discussing some of the specific features of the developing theology and practice of early particular Baptist congregations, including the development of ‘lay ministry’ in relation to their immediate historical context. In terms of the theme of the conference Birch then argues that, without claiming a causal link, the Baptist theology of ministry as found in these congregations conforms to the pattern of the communal priesthood in Luther. From this point he goes on to discuss further Baptist understandings of the ‘call to ministry’ and ‘ordination’ in relation to a concept of communal priesthood.

**Revd Dr Stuart Blythe (Rector IBTSC Amsterdam)**



# What Baptists have learned and still can learn from Luther in the doctrines of Justification and of the Church

Uwe Swarat

This article seeks to demonstrate how close Luther's teaching and Baptist convictions are. Especially in the doctrines of justification and ecclesiology Baptists have learnt and still can learn from Luther. For Luther justification is by no means only forgiveness but also spiritual renewal, so that justification and sanctification are closely linked together. The Baptist statements on the local congregation of believers and their being endowed with Christ's authority as well as the priesthood of all believers are based on Luther's teachings. Baptists attach more value to church discipline than Luther. They can nevertheless learn from his rationale of particular ministries among a community of believers.

## Key Words

Martin Luther, Baptists, Justification, Church

## Introduction

When a Baptist theologian is required to evaluate Luther's theology,<sup>1</sup> he could easily do this using the old ways of controversial theology. He would have to explain why a Baptist holds Luther's defence of infant baptism to be a mistake, perhaps even why Luther's overall understanding of the sacraments is erroneous, and also why Luther's adherence to the national church model of ecclesiology was a hindrance to a true reformation of the church and why his accusation against the Pope, that he was the antichrist,<sup>2</sup> rebounded on Luther himself, because Luther also persecuted the saints,

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is a shortened translation of a study originally written in German; see 'Jenseits der Taufkontroverse – Wo sich Baptisten Luther anschließen könn(t)en', in: *Luther und die Reformation aus freikirchlicher Sicht*, ed. by Volker Spangenberg (Göttingen: V & R unipress, 2013), pp. 31-53. It has been presented in full length in English at the CEBTS Conference in Elstal (Germany) on 29 June 2016. For the present publication the third part of the study, treating Luther's doctrine of the two kingdoms, has been omitted on grounds of length. It will possibly be published later in an amplified version.

<sup>2</sup> See 'Passional Christi und Antichristi' (1521), in *D. Martin Luthers Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe* (Weimar, 1883 ff [= *WA*]) 9,676-715 and more often. For the antichrist as persecutor of Christians see especially 'Defense and Explanation of All the Articles of Dr. Martin Luther which were Unjustly Condemned by the Roman Bull' (1521), in *Luther's Works. American Edition* (St. Louis, 1955ff [= *LW*]), 32:87-88. Cf. Bernd Moeller, 'Luther und das Papsttum', in *Luther Handbuch*, ed. by Albrecht Beutel (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 2005), pp. 106-15.

namely the Anabaptists (see Revelation 13.7). Happily, this kind of controversial theology was widely disposed of in the twentieth century, because the ecumenical dialogues have shown that meeting representatives of other confessions in the spirit of Christian love makes a more differentiated perception of each other possible, a common inquiry of biblical truth, mutual learning from one another, and the discovery of numerous areas of consensus.

In view of the ecumenical situation it is quite appropriate for a Baptist theologian to go beyond the controversy about baptism and the associated matters of dispute and to emphasise instead the areas that we have in common. Thereby it should not be denied that unsolved theological contradictions remain, but it should nevertheless be demonstrated that there are many points of agreement between Baptist and Lutheran theology, perhaps more than many on each side have recognised. A look at the common ground might help Lutherans and Baptists to appreciate better their belonging together within the Reformation tradition and to accept this firmly. This would have to be connected with the will to deepen further the areas of agreement already existing.

In this paper two doctrinal statements of Luther are to be presented. In my judgement, open-minded Baptists can and should be in theological agreement with these, without having to deny their own convictions – but rather from these statements they can learn to express their own convictions in a theologically well thought-out manner. I am going to talk about theological concepts which Baptists have received from Luther and which they can better understand and explain, if they continue to learn from and argue with Luther. Such a comparison between Lutheran and Baptist doctrinal statements is not easy, as there are no sources on the Baptist side – at least in German speaking countries – that could stand comparison with the thematic breadth and theological elaborateness of Luther's works. For this reason, I have to risk on occasion presenting the Baptist position from my own point of view, without wishing to speak only for myself, but rather to formulate what I perceive as being the oral tradition that has shaped the thought of Baptist theologians and church members in Germany up to the recent past.

The theme of this paper makes it necessary to undertake a particular interpretation of Luther's theological statements – which for one who is neither a specialist on Luther nor even a member of a Lutheran church, also presents a risk. I have looked for support from the literature of Lutheran experts, first of all from recent complete overviews of Luther's theology,<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Oswald Bayer, *Martin Luther's Theology. A Contemporary Interpretation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008); Bernhard Lohse, *Luthers Theologie in ihrer historischen Entwicklung und in ihrem systematischen Zusammenhang* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007); Paul Althaus, *Die Theologie Martin Luthers*



but also from various individual studies. The view of Luther's theology, which I have gained from these readings, has of course been influenced by my own preconceptions, but which I nevertheless hope is broadly accurate and also acceptable for Lutherans.

In the available space I am not able to examine the whole of Luther's theology in order to find agreements with and/or differences from Baptist convictions, but must rather choose some particular themes. I shall do this by confining myself to the areas of the doctrine of justification and of ecclesiology, leaving the issue of political ethics, in particular the relationship between church and state, for a further publication. I do this, conscious of the fact that in these areas we shall speak about subjects that are also of particular interest to Baptists.

## **Justification as Forgiveness and Renewal**

The term 'justification', which lies at the centre of Luther's theology, is only rarely used in Baptist theology and preaching in German speaking countries. We speak rather of reconciliation between God and mankind, of the redemption of the world through Jesus Christ, or of the conversion and new birth of humans. In substance the Lutheran teaching on justification is nevertheless present in Baptist confessions as well as in the Baptist preaching tradition.<sup>4</sup> The redemption of mankind is based on the person and work of Christ alone and is given to the sinner through grace alone, and that by means of the preaching of the word, which is received in faith, so that humans become children of God through faith alone and not through their own works. The Lutheran exclusive formulae *sola fide*, *sola gratia*, *per Christum solum* are solid constituent parts of Baptist faith. Of course Baptists emphasise particularly the *unity* of faith and works, forgiveness of sins and new life, justification and sanctification, admittedly so that more weight is usually placed on the second of these paired terms, that is, on the new life, the works, and the sanctification. That is the reason why Luther's central term 'justification' is relatively seldom used by Baptists. They saw and see that in the Lutheran tradition a form of teaching and preaching often dominates, in which justification is understood merely as absolution from sins, as a divine judgement on humans, which in the humans themselves

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(Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1994); Paul Althaus, *Die Ethik Martin Luthers* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1965).

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Volker Spangenberg, 'Was ist uns wichtig? Grundlegende Identitätsmerkmale der Rechtfertigungslehre aus der Tradition für die heutige Situation (Baptismus)', in *Rechtfertigung in freikirchlicher und römisch-katholischer Sicht*, ed. by W. Klaiber and W. Thönnissen (Paderborn: Bonifatius, 2003), pp. 57-71; Uwe Swarat, 'Das baptistische Verständnis von Rechtfertigung und die "Gemeinsame Erklärung zur Rechtfertigungslehre" von Lutheranern und Katholiken', in *Von Gott angenommen – in Christus verwandelt*, ed. by U. Swarat and others, Beiheft zur Ökumenischen Rundschau Nr. 78 (Frankfurt am Main: Lembeck, 2006), pp. 177-197.

leaves everything as it was before, and which therefore requires the supplementary sanctification. This image corresponds on the one hand to the traditional Catholic critique of the Lutheran teaching, and on the other hand to the attitude of the Anabaptists, who regarded the Lutheran position as a neglect of discipleship of Christ, as well as to the leitmotif of the Pietists, who missed in the Lutheran churches the sanctified life of Christians living according to the Word of God and who attempted to redeem this shortcoming. The Baptists in Germany adopted the idea of the Anabaptists and the Pietists that the Lutheran teaching on justification, in a certain sense, had stalled half-way and did not progress from the forgiveness of sins to the ethical renewal of life. This is a reproach that one could perhaps direct against the post-Reformation Lutherans, but not against Luther himself.

Luther used the term ‘justification’ or ‘justify’ in a dual sense.<sup>5</sup> On the one hand he used it to label the judgement with which God declares humans to be righteous, that is, the judicial act of calling a sinner righteous. But Luther uses the term also to describe the event by which the human gains a substantial share in the righteousness of Christ. This involves the human becoming factually righteous. For Luther the forensic, judicial act of declaring to be righteous is closely connected to the effective act of God by which the inner being of humans is changed.

In the first instance justification is for Luther actually a forensic event. The declaration of the sinner to be righteous occurs when God does not count his sins against him, and when God recognises a righteousness in the sinner, which the sinner does not have himself, but which is conferred to him from without and is recognised as an alien righteousness, namely the righteousness of Christ. The righteousness of the Christian is none other than the righteousness of Christ. Justification as a declaration of righteousness or as recognition of righteousness before God is, according to Luther, only available to us through faith. Believing means that we accept God’s judgement over us: His judgement over us without Christ, that is the condemnation, but also His judgement over us for the sake of Christ, and that is acceptance by God. Faith does not justify in and of itself, but solely in that it apprehends Christ and allows Christ to dwell within the person. In this understanding of faith as an internal fellowship with Christ the two aspects in which Luther speaks of justification combine: justification as being

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<sup>5</sup> Regarding Luther’s doctrine of justification see, in addition to the complete overviews of Luther’s theology mentioned in note 2, also *Angeklagt und anerkannt. Luthers Rechtfertigungslehre in gegenwärtiger Verantwortung*, ed. by Hans Christian Knuth (Erlangen: Martin-Luther-Verlag, 2009); Dietrich Korsch, ‘Glaube und Rechtfertigung’, in *Luther Handbuch*, pp. 372-81; Albrecht Peters, *Rechtfertigung. Handbuch Systematischer Theologie*, vol. 12 (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1990), pp. 27-62; Otto Hermann Pesch, *Theologie der Rechtfertigung bei Martin Luther und Thomas von Aquin* (Mainz: Matthias-Grünwald-Verlag, 1967 (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1985); Wilfried Joest, *Gesetz und Freiheit. Das Problem des Tertius usus legis bei Luther und die neutestamentliche Parainese* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1968).

declared righteous for the sake of Christ and justification as being made righteous through Christ.

The actual making a human righteous, that is his new, ontological righteousness, results out of Christ living in his heart through faith. Christ works as a power of God that transforms us sinners from within to become like Christ's being. Luther says that Christ fulfils God's law for us in a twofold manner: first through his own working for us outside us, then also through the Holy Spirit in us, whereby we follow Christ. Faith is thus fellowship with Christ and as such is at once the origin of a new obedience to God, the beginning of a new being. Receiving forgiveness in faith is likewise receiving the willingness to serve one's neighbour in love and to struggle against sin. Both aspects of the justification of the sinner belong intrinsically together, but remain nevertheless different. Righteousness arising from the imputation of Christ's righteousness differs from the substantial righteousness, in that the former is already completed in the present: We *are* righteous. Being made righteous is, however, not yet completed, but has just begun. Here we must say: We *shall become* righteous. There is therefore an 'already but not yet': We are already righteous in the sense that Christ's righteousness has already been imputed to us; we are not yet righteous in the sense of being substantially righteous.

Looking at the ontological righteousness of man does not cause Luther to lose sight of Christ. The new creation, which has begun in a Christian, does not change the fact that the Christian is still a sinner. The ontological righteousness has just begun, and what does not correspond to it in our lives is and remains guilt. We cannot reckon up our progress in sanctification against our failures, so what we still owe God can only be forgiven for the sake of Christ. As long as we live, our obedience and our love remain mixed with sin, and for this reason the works, which we do in faith, cannot justify us before God; they remain half-hearted, half-complete and stained by sin and can only for Christ's sake not be accounted to us as guilt.

Martin Luther's understanding of justification thus involves forgiveness and renewal, acquittal and transformation, the end of the old and the beginning of the new man, and these are closely connected. Sanctification as a process of growth of the unfolding new life belongs for him to the term justification. In this respect, Luther's theology of sanctification is much more closely connected with justification than with Philipp Melanchthon or even John Calvin.<sup>6</sup> For Melanchthon forgiveness

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<sup>6</sup> See Philipp Melanchthon, *Loci communes 1543*, transl. by J. A. O. Preus (St. Louis: Concordia Publ. House, 1992), pp. 85-96 and John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. by J. T. McNeill, trans. by F. L. Battles, The Library of Christian Classics, vol. XX (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), III. 11. Compare Albrecht Peters, *Rechtfertigung* with his book, written as a Lutheran theologian together with

and renewal also belong together, but he reserves the term justification for forgiveness, for the liberation from the *guilt* of sin. The renewal or the liberation from the *power* of sin is seen as a necessary consequence of justification, but cannot be considered as an element of justification itself. This restriction of the term justification to the imputation of the alien righteousness of Christ has probably contributed a lot to the fact that Lutheran theology after the Reformation increasingly placed the aspect of making righteous – the effective element of the process of justification – behind the aspect of imputing righteousness. Calvin, too, distinguished between justification and sanctification, or forgiveness of sins and the new birth. Justification is for him also not a making righteous, but rather the validation of righteousness, to which the spiritual renewal, which stretches out over the whole Christian life, must be added. Although for Calvin the actual inner renewal of the justified is so important that in his *Institutio Christianae Religionis* (Institutes of the Christian Religion) he even placed this aspect before the aspect of forgiveness; he did not retain Luther's accomplished integration of forgiveness and renewal.

Luther's well-known formula *simul iustus et peccator* (sinner and saint at the same time) depicts the dual character of Christian righteousness as imputed and substantial. For Luther the Christian is both a saint and a sinner. Both are true at the same time, because each is spoken of in a different manner. We are sinners with regard to God's stringent judgement; we are righteous with regard to His great mercy. In ourselves we are sinners in our reality on earth; we are righteous through God's judgement that reckons us as righteous for Christ's sake. Both are always true at the same time for the same person and this throughout his whole life; and it applies to him totally. As a Christian I am not part-sinner and part-righteous, but rather wholly sinner and wholly righteous, according to whether I look at myself or look to Christ.

Nevertheless, Luther's 'sinner and saint at the same time' does not just describe two total aspects of the Christian, but also partial aspects, that is, there is also a 'partly-partly'. In this partial aspect, the Christian is righteous because he struggles against himself as the old man, through the power of Christ that dwells in his heart by faith. He is therefore righteous, insofar as the substantial righteousness in his life is being unfolded. But he is at the same time a sinner, because in his whole life he has to struggle against sin and commit the old Adam to death.

This simultaneous being a sinner and a saint holds here because we shall never fully overcome the sinful flesh in this life. The established

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the Catholic Otto Hermann Pesch, *Einführung in die Lehre von Gnade und Rechtfertigung* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1994).

wording *simul iustus et peccator* is understood by Luther in a twofold sense, as a statement about the totality and about the parts, and correspondingly our behaviour as Christians is to be understood in a twofold sense. In consequence of the total aspect we have to commit ourselves daily to God's judgement over us, in that we need to look away from ourselves daily and establish ourselves in Christ. From the partial aspect it emerges that we experience a dying of the old man and a gradual growing of the new man: I *am* fully righteous and yet I must still *become* fully righteous.

My impression is that this twofold understanding of the sinner-saint paradigm has been hardly recognised in Baptist theology until now. When Baptists (at least in the German speaking countries) do employ this term, it is usually used as evidence that holiness has not been given sufficient space in Luther's teaching on justification. The partial aspect of the term has not been recognised, only the total aspect, and thus the term has been interpreted as though it means no spiritual growth and no overcoming of sin, but only a continual swing between sin and forgiveness. On the other hand, I perceive that Lutheran theologians too seldom teach sanctification as a growth process, as Luther did. I often hear and read Luther's statement that 'to make progress is nothing else than always to begin'.<sup>7</sup> The sentence that immediately follows is usually ignored: 'To begin without making progress is to fail.' Luther recognises growth and advancement in righteousness.<sup>8</sup>

The subject matter touches of course on the exposition of the seventh chapter of the Epistle of Paul to the Romans and the question whether Romans 7 describes the situation of Christians, of which Luther himself was certain, or if the not yet regenerated human is being described there and the Christian is not yet the subject until chapter eight, of which modern exegetes are convinced. Linked to this is the thorny question that above all divides Catholics and Lutherans: whether the remaining desire (Greek *epithymia*, Latin *concupiscentia*) should be regarded as sin and the Christian precisely for that reason is both a saint and a sinner, or if the evil lusts in Christians denote only a potential for sinning, so that the Christian is substantially no longer a sinner, but rather a righteous being. Here a wide field is opened for us, into which we must not enter, to avoid wandering from our topic.

Nevertheless, I do not wish to close the section on the doctrine of justification without having drawn attention to the fact that Luther had such a high regard toward good works, which arise from faith, that we can find in him even an early form of the *sylogismus practicus* (English *practical*

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<sup>7</sup> 'Dictata super Psalterium' (1513-16), *LW* 11:477.

<sup>8</sup> That Luther's phrase 'always to begin' certainly does not describe being a Christian as a Sisyphean challenge, in which we are continually being thrown back to the starting point, but rather as a continuous progression, was clearly elaborated by Theodor Dieter, *Der junge Luther und Aristoteles* (Berlin / New York: W. de Gruyter, 2001), pp. 317-25.

*syllogism*), which is usually considered to be typically Calvinistic, that is, we see evidence of faith through good works. According to Luther, works cannot bring about our salvation, for they become good works only through faith. The good works arise from faith. But there is also a converse relationship between faith and works, namely on the level of knowledge. Luther also says: From the works I can recognise if true faith is present in me and in others, or if it is merely a feigned or dead faith. When a human being lives at ease with his gross sins, then it is clear that God has not given him any forgiveness. However, when we can see good works, works of love, when we can perceive struggle against sin and new obedience, then we can be certain that real faith is present. As scriptural warrant for this order of knowledge, Luther gives above all the proof texts 2 Peter 1.10 and Matthew 6.14ff; he also takes up the message of James' Epistle in a positive manner. Luther sticks with the notion that works can neither attain salvation nor guarantee it, but they can give us assurance of salvation, because they are fruits of faith.

Let us now proceed from the teaching on justification to that on ecclesiology.

## **The Christian Church as a Community of Priests**

From its beginnings Baptist ecclesiology has held three central assertions:<sup>9</sup> firstly, that the Christian church is a community of believers who voluntarily come together at a place in the name of Jesus; secondly, that the gathered congregation has all authority, which Jesus conferred upon the Christian church; and thirdly, that the members of the church are all 'priests' in the sense that they are all endowed with spiritual gifts and are called to participate in the life of the church, and all have the basic right to take part in the public preaching of the Word and to lead in baptism and the Lord's Supper. This ecclesiology would be historically inconceivable without the ecclesiology of Martin Luther and it corresponds in individual points more closely to Luther's understanding of the Church than many Baptists

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<sup>9</sup> See Karen E. Smith, 'Kirche als Gemeinschaft der Gläubigen. Der Bundesgedanke in der Ekklesiologie des frühen Baptismus', in *Baptismus. Geschichte und Gegenwart*, ed. by Andrea Strübind and Martin Rothkegel (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2012), pp. 23-43; Paul Beasley-Murray and Hans Guderian, *Miteinander Gemeinde bauen. Ein anderer Weg, Kirche zu sein* (Wuppertal und Kassel: Oncken-Verlag, 1995); Wiard Popkes, *Gemeinde – Raum des Vertrauens. Neutestamentliche Beobachtungen und freikirchliche Perspektiven* (Wuppertal und Kassel: Oncken Verlag, 1984); Edwin Brandt, 'Vom Bekenntnis der Baptisten', in *Ein Herr, ein Glaube, eine Taufe. Festschrift 150 Jahre Baptistengemeinden in Deutschland*, ed. by Günter Balders (Wuppertal und Kassel: Oncken Verlag, 1984), pp. 175-232 (pp. 191-224); Hans Luckey, 'Die Gemeinde der Gläubigen', in *Die Baptisten*, ed. by J. D. Hughey, *Die Kirchen der Welt*, vol. 11 (Stuttgart: Evang. Verlags-Werk, 1964), pp. 58-72; Ernest A. Payne, *The Fellowship of Believers. Baptist thought and practice yesterday and today* (London: Kingsgate Press, 1952).

recognise. In order to show this, I shall briefly sketch Luther's ecclesiology.<sup>10</sup>

Luther finds the Christian Church concisely and clearly defined in the Apostles' Creed. He understands the term *communio sanctorum* (communion of the saints) in the third article as an explanation of the term immediately preceding it, *sancta ecclesia catholica* (the holy, Catholic Church). The holy Catholic Church should therefore be understood as a communion of the saints, or, as Luther preferred to say, a 'community of saints'.<sup>11</sup> In his Large Catechism he described the term *communio sanctorum* with the words 'a congregation composed only of saints', or a 'holy community'. Thus Luther's definition of the church does not start with the institution, nor from the hierarchy or the church as an institution for salvation, as it has long been seen by the Roman Catholic Church. He understands the Church to be primarily a congregation, a fellowship of people, a 'community of pure saints'. For this reason, he disliked the word 'church', as he mistakenly derived it from the Latin word 'curia', that is, from the papal administration in Rome, and because he observed that the Germans thought of church first of all as a stone building. Luther in contrast understood 'church' to be the believing people and therefore translated in the New Testament throughout the Greek word *ekklesia* with 'Gemeine', that is 'congregation/community', or 'Christianity'.

His best-known formulation of the term for Church is found in the *LW* Articles and reads: 'God be praised, a seven-year-old child knows what the church is: holy believers and "the little sheep who hear the voice of their shepherd"'.<sup>12</sup> The church is therefore the body of believers who are called into the congregation by the voice of their shepherd Jesus Christ. Faith, which makes people members of the Christian congregation, comes from hearing the voice of the Good Shepherd. Because faith comes from hearing (Romans 10.17), not only the believers but also the Word of God belong to the concept of church. As believing people of God, the Church is created by the Word of God. The Church is therefore in essence an assembly of believers and for that reason a *creatura verbi* (creation of the Word).

Up to this point most Baptists will be able to follow Luther and possibly even perceive that Baptist ecclesiology has often stood and still

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. in particular Dorothea Wendebourg, 'Kirche', in *Luther Handbuch*, pp. 403-14; Ulrich Kühn, *Kirche*. Handbuch Systematischer Theologie, vol. 10 (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagsaus, 1980); Karl Holl, 'Die Entstehung von Luthers Kirchenbegriff', and 'Luther und das landesherrliche Kirchenregiment', in idem, *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Kirchengeschichte, vol. I: Luther* (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck 1932 and 1948), pp. 238-325 and pp. 326-80 as well as my article 'Die Kennzeichen der wahren Kirche (notae ecclesiae)', *Theologisches Gespräch* 24 (2000), 4-19.

<sup>11</sup> See Luther's Large Catechism, in *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, ed. by Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert (Minneapolis, 2000) (= *BoC*), pp. 435-38 (p.437).

<sup>12</sup> See *Book of Concord*, pp. 324-25.

stands in danger of building the church on the basis of fellowship-engendering actions of believers, and not letting it be grounded in the Word of God that creates faith.<sup>13</sup> The mutual relationship between Word and faith in Luther's theology should actually serve as an incentive and corrective for Baptist ecclesiology.

Another point made by Luther's ecclesiology has often led to critical questioning from the Baptist side, and that is his belief in the invisibility or hiddenness of the church. For Luther, the hiddenness of the Church results from the fact that the Church is a community of believers, because the faith of a person cannot be identified by others. Christ as Head of the Church is likewise invisible, and the Church, as a spiritual community, is a work of God that is not manifest to everyone, but can only be recognised as a work of God through an illumination wrought by the Holy Spirit. The hiddenness of the Church of Christ was especially important for Luther in order to oppose the Roman Catholic claim to power. The Pope does rule over the visible church body on earth, but not over the hidden church, for her members are not known by any man, not even by the Pope. The papal ban can excommunicate someone from the visible church, but not from the invisible church.

Luther, however, did not consider the hiddenness of the Church to be absolute, but understood it rather as an essential secret of the Christian church, which is hidden from the eyes of the world. The true church is for him both invisible as well as visible, hidden and revealed, depending on the starting point. The invisible church always possesses visible signs, by which one can recognise that the true people of God are present. Luther holds such visible signs of the church to be first of all the preaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments according to the gospel; in some later statements he included confession, the calling of ministers, prayer, afflictions and persecution. He described it most aptly when along the lines of Romans 10.10 he differentiated between the faith of the heart and the confession of the tongue. One cannot see the faith of the heart, but the believers can be recognised on account of their confession. It is therefore valid that 'the congregation is visible because of the confession'.<sup>14</sup> Thus Baptists will also be able to say with Luther that the church is in her nature both hidden and nevertheless recognisable by means of the Word and her confession.

We have to return to the key term 'communion of the saints', because Luther gives this term a deeper significance than that the church is simply a

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<sup>13</sup> Cf. my article 'Der Gemeindebund - mehr als ein Zweckverband?' In *Theologisches Gespräch Beiheft* 2 (2001), 3-32.

<sup>14</sup> 'The doctoral disputation of Johannes Macchabäus Scotus' (1542), *WA* 39 II, 161, 8. This text has not yet been included in *LW*.



gathering of holy people. By ‘communion of the saints’ Luther also understands the giving and taking of the believers with one another and the working for each other. Communion of the saints means for him joint property and a joyful exchange, as it is prefigured in the relationship of the individual to Christ. Christ put off His glory in order to take on our misery, sin and condemnation, and we may be rid of our misery and receive the glory and the life of Christ. It is also thus, according to Luther, in the life of the church. Nobody lives for himself alone; rather, each always lives for the other. The faith of other Christians, their obedience and prayer are a help to me in my doubts, in my poverty, and in my lack of power. This happens in a hidden way, in ways that only God knows, but it also happens recognisably through the petitionary prayers of the church and ‘mutual conversation and consolation of brothers and sisters’ – *per mutuum colloquium et consolatio fratrum*.<sup>15</sup> Communion of the saints means for Luther, above all, applying one’s own righteousness for other sinners, not distancing oneself from fallen and weak fellow Christians, but rather placing oneself at their side and in this solidarity trying to help them out of their sin.

This is a deep understanding of what the Church is, because it is a deep understanding of what Christ does for us. At the same time, it takes seriously the awareness that the communion of the *saints* is always also a communion of *sinners*, who are not only in need of divine forgiveness but also of human representation. Nevertheless, Luther understood the solidarity with sinners, which belongs to the nature of the church, in the manner that it also includes solidarity with a degenerate church, and for this reason sharply repudiated and indeed opposed building visible congregations of saints and believers. For him the true Church practically can arise only in the framework of a national, established church that is, within an institution, which as *corpus permixtum*, ‘mixed body’, includes good and evil people. As free-church people we must at this point critically argue that Luther distorts the difference between the forms of an established church and a free church, when he discredits the fundamental principle of the free churches from the outset as an expression of spiritual pride. Even a church of voluntary members, which exercises church discipline, will – if it understands itself correctly – not claim to be without sin, but will understand the holiness of the congregation as well as the effective justification of the individual as a process of growth, which is never completed in this life and which nevertheless may not be abandoned. Apart from that, we may not limit the confession of Christ in word and deed, which Luther names as an outward sign of the Church,<sup>16</sup> to a ‘core congregation’, lest the hidden and the visible church should become two churches.

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<sup>15</sup> Smalcald Articles, *BoC*, 319.

<sup>16</sup> See ‘On the Councils and the Church’ (1539), *LW* 41:149-150.

In the introduction to his *German Mass and Order of Service* of 1526, Luther let it be known that he considered an alternative form to the national church to be possible. He states here that those ‘who want to be Christians in earnest and who profess the gospel with hand and mouth should sign their names and meet alone in a house somewhere’.<sup>17</sup> That would be a voluntary congregation of confessing Christians who came together to celebrate their own service of worship, and who would, according to Luther, also celebrate baptism and the Lord’s supper, do Christian works and practise church discipline according to the rule in Matthew 18. 15ff. Here we have one of the few instances where Luther develops a church model which is not based on a national church. However, he develops this model only theoretically. He wrote: ‘I neither can nor desire to begin such a congregation or assembly or to make rules for it. For I have not yet the people or persons for it.’ You may historically judge as you wish this explanation of why he did not actively build such a congregation. The fact that Luther considered a voluntary church of seriously-minded Christians as a fundamentally legitimate expression of protestant churchdom, is not at all diminished by his reluctance to put this into practice. The Anabaptists first and then the free churches arising from the Puritans and Evangelicals did indeed put into practice what Luther was not yet willing to venture.

Luther was the first to give theological reasons for the spiritual authority of every local congregation. This arises out of his concept of church, which lets the hidden Church of Jesus Christ become visible where God’s Word is preached, where it is believed and confessed in word and deed.<sup>18</sup> The congregation of believers gathered at one place around the sermon and the sacraments is for him the basic form of the Christian Church. Such a local church has both the right and the power to assess all teaching and teachers, that is, to call preachers and pastors, to commission them in their ministry and to dismiss them. It thus possesses all those rights that in the Roman Church had been reserved for the bishops, the councils, and the Pope.<sup>19</sup> The office of bishop is for Luther identical with the office of the local church pastor. Nevertheless, Luther did not champion a purely Congregationalist church constitution, because he wanted the trans-local unity of Christendom to gain a visible form too. This is a way of understanding the church that has received too little attention in Baptist teaching and practice in general.<sup>20</sup> As the hidden, universal Church is made

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<sup>17</sup> LW 53:64.

<sup>18</sup> See ‘On the Councils and the Church’ (1539), LW 41:149-150.

<sup>19</sup> See ‘That a Christian Assembly or Congregation Has the Right and Power to Judge All Teaching and to Call, Appoint, and Dismiss Teachers, Established and Proven by Scripture’ (1523), LW 39:305-314.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. my article ‘Ortsgemeinden und überörtliche Strukturen im Baptismus aus der Perspektive reformatorischer Ekklesiologie’, in Die “Autonomie” der Ortsgemeinden und ihre Gemeinschaft, Ein Lehrgespräch des Baptistischen Weltbundes, Theologisches Gespräch *Beiheft* 10 (2009), 103-116.

visible in every local congregation, every local church is from the outset dependent on the others and is linked to them in a unity – a unity that must be equally as visible as the unity of the local congregation itself. It was therefore correct that Luther organised regular visitations of the local congregations and attempted to create a regional office of protestant bishops. Had this last effort been more successfully implemented, it would have averted the emergence of church government through sovereigns and would have made possible the development of a regional organisation of the protestant church that was independent from the state.

Luther could state that a Christian congregation has the right and power to call and install preachers and ministers from its midst, because for him the priesthood of all believers was the norm of the church order. That not only persons consecrated by bishops are priests, but all Christians, is for Luther a result not only of the clear witness of Holy Scripture, but also of the nature of the Church as a communion of the saints. Being a priest means, for Luther, acting as a representative for others before God, offering sacrifices to God and proclaiming the Word of God to others. In this sense, Jesus Christ became a priest for us all, and in this sense all Christians should sacrifice themselves for others, pray for them and proclaim God's Word to them. A Christian thus becomes a priest for others. Included in this priesthood of all believers is the spiritual authority and fundamental right of every Christian to preach, to baptise, to administer the Lord's Supper and to listen to the confession of others. Luther makes what in the Catholic Church is reserved for the ordained priests a commission for all Christians.

Where there is an orderly congregational life, the public exercise of this spiritual authority must nevertheless be linked to a proper calling through the congregation. Luther argues that there should be particular ministries in the congregation of priests, to avoid chaos when all members of the congregation would want to preach and administer the Lord's Supper at the same time. Thus, he argued from reasons of good order. This point of orderliness is not only important for practical, organisational reasons, but also for specific theological reasons, for the sake of the priesthood of believers. The equality of all believers in their spiritual authority would be harmed, when individual believers would claim their rights for themselves without a calling coming from the congregation. The congregation must therefore call an appropriate person to represent the others in their name in preaching, administering the sacraments, hearing private confessions of sin and providing absolution. Whoever is called in this way gains no advantage over the congregation, but is rather a servant to the congregation in their common commission from God. Luther's understanding of ministry arises directly from the concept of the priesthood of believers.

We may not make such an assertion without pointing out at the same time that, until today, this issue has been controversial in the interpretation of Luther. Since the nineteenth century the so-called ‘transfer theory’ (German *Übertragungstheorie*) has stood in opposition to the ‘institution theory’ (German *Stiftungstheorie*). The transfer theory was conceived by Johann Höfling (1802-53),<sup>21</sup> the practical theologian from Erlangen. The institution theory was most vehemently advocated by the Marburg theologian August Vilmar (1800-68).<sup>22</sup> The transfer theory derives the ordained ministry from the priesthood of all believers and grounds it in the congregation, ‘from the bottom up’, as we have just seen. The institution theory, on the other hand, grounds the ordained ministry ‘from above’, from Christ, and derives it from the office of the apostles.<sup>23</sup> It seems to me from more recent investigations that the balance is clearly in favour of the transfer theory.<sup>24</sup> Apart from the question of which interpretation of Luther is more precise, a protestant theory of ministry can only be based on the transfer theory, if it does not wish to separate ministry and congregation or clerics and lay people in an unbiblical manner. Above all, the transfer theory is the theologically superior solution, because it can integrate the justifiable concern of the institution theory, namely the grounding of the ordained office from above. The creation of an orderly office of preaching and ministry is not simply a merely human organisational affair, but rather it is Christ Himself who calls and installs His servants by means of the congregation. The ministers then exercise their ministry, as Luther puts it, ‘in behalf of and in the name of the church, or rather by reason of their institution by Christ, as St. Paul states in Ephesians 4[.8], “He received gifts among men.”’<sup>25</sup> The installation through the church and the appointment through Christ coincide for Luther. The called office-bearer does not thereby gain any higher status above the congregation. He only stands before the congregation because and as long as he is carrying out his office, that is, as he discharges his ministry

<sup>21</sup> Johann W. F. Höfling, *Grundsätze evangelisch-lutherischer Kirchenverfassung* (Erlangen: Blaesing, 1853); cf. Manfred Kießig, *Johann Wilhelm Friedrich Höfling. Leben und Werk, Die Lutherische Kirche, Geschichte und Gestalten*, vol. 14 (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1991).

<sup>22</sup> August F. Chr. Vilmar, *Die Lehre vom geistlichen Amt* (Marburg und Leipzig: Elwert, 1870); cf. Herbert Kemler, *Gott mehr gehorchen als den Menschen. Christlicher Glaube zwischen Restauration und Revolution – dargestellt an der kurhessischen Renitenz* (Gießen: Brunnen, 2005); Gerhard Müller, *Die Bedeutung August Vilmars für Theologie und Kirche. Theologische Existenz heute*; N.F. 158 (München, 1969). Another important spokesman of the institution theory has been the expert in constitutional law Friedrich Julius Stahl (1802-61) in Berlin in his work *Die Kirchenverfassung nach Lehre und Recht der Protestanten* (Erlangen: Blaesing, 1862); cf. Arie Nablings, *Friedrich Julius Stahl - Rechtsphilosophie und Kirchenpolitik* (Bielefeld: Luther-Verlag, 1983).

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Gilberto da Silva, ‘Luthers Rezeption in den Vorgängerkirchen der SELK am Beispiel der Lehre vom geistlichen Amt der Kirche’, in *Freikirchenforschung* No. 20 (Münster: Verein für Freikirchenforschung, 2011), pp. 117-132.

<sup>24</sup> See Harald Goertz, *Allgemeines Priestertum und ordiniertes Amt bei Luther* (Marburg: Elwert, 1997); Klaus Peter Voß, *Der Gedanke des allgemeinen Priester- und Prophetentums. Seine gemeindetheologische Aktualisierung in der Reformationszeit* (Wuppertal und Zürich: R. Brockhaus, 1990).

<sup>25</sup> ‘On the Councils and the Church’ (1539), *LW* 41:154.

in the name of Christ. But in this sense, according to Luther, every Christian stands before each other in God's commission, when he has a word from God to say to him. Luther's understanding of the office of the ministry is thus completely oriented towards the task of disseminating the gospel.

It is important, from a Baptist perspective, to appreciate Luther's teaching on the priesthood of all believers: firstly, so that Baptists may remain conscious of whom they have to thank for this key teaching, and that in this respect they have a close affinity to Lutheran ecclesiology. Then also, because Baptists can learn from Luther that the priesthood of all believers by no means stands in contradiction to the calling or ordaining of individual ministers. The calling of office-bearers is a necessary consequence of the common priesthood. If all members of the congregation have the same spiritual authority, then the exercise of this authority must be ordered in such a way that no individual can declare himself to be responsible on his own; rather the congregation must pronounce a corresponding calling of an individual. That is the core of the protestant understanding of ministry that Baptists not only *can* share, but *should* share.

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# Anabaptists and the Magisterial Reformation – the Question of Grace and Free Will with Particular Emphasis on the Danish Context

Johannes Steenbuch

Although there are obvious similarities, modern Baptists should be cautious about identifying too narrowly with the Anabaptists of the sixteenth century. Where many Anabaptists held a somewhat synergistic view on free will and salvation, the opposite has historically been the case for Baptists. This is also true for the Danish Baptist tradition, where key figures tended to identify with the Reformed tradition rather than the Anabaptists. But rather than trying to side with one or the other tradition, there are good reasons for modern Baptists to maintain a safe distance from the Reformation debates. The pay-off would not just be the possibility of non-partiality, but also that of embracing a wider range of the elements of Reformation theology, thinking and practice.

## Key words

Anabaptists, Baptists, Monergism, Synergism, Danish Baptists

## Introduction

‘In which way is our Baptist movement linked to or in tension with the Reformation in Europe in the sixteenth century?’<sup>1</sup> Any Protestant denomination might indeed ask itself similar questions as we celebrate or commemorate the Reformation jubilee in 2017. But, for Baptists, answering this kind of question is made a complicated task by the fact that it is not always easy to talk about Baptists as forming one specific denomination or church tradition.

Although I sympathise with the idea of a somewhat broad and non-dogmatic definition of ‘baptists’,<sup>2</sup> I will argue that we should be cautious about too quick an identification between modern Baptists and the Anabaptists of the sixteenth century. There are, of course, likenesses, but there are also clear differences between the historically sometimes very

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<sup>1</sup> This article is based on a paper for the Consortium of European Baptist Theological Seminaries (CEBTS) conference in Elstal (June-July 2016), at which this question was the main topic.

<sup>2</sup> As implied by James McClendon’s notion of ‘small-b baptists’.

‘Reformed’ theology of some Baptists (or capital-B-Baptists!) and many or most Anabaptists of the Reformation. Many Baptists would be more likely to identify with Zwingli and Calvin than with, say, Balthasar Hubmaier or Menno Simons. But rather than trying to side with one or the other theological or churchly tradition stemming from the Reformation years, there are good reasons for modern Baptists to keep a safe distance from the Reformation debates, so to speak. Such a distance would allow us not only to claim a degree of non-partiality, but also to embrace a wider range of the sometimes very diverse elements of Reformation theology, thinking and practice.

In this paper I will discuss, first, some of the main theological differences between the magisterial Reformation and the radical Reformation, especially as pertaining to the understanding of grace and the role of human choice in these traditions. Many other themes could be investigated in addition, such as the opinions on the relationship between church and state. But my point is that there are major theological differences between Anabaptist and later Baptists, and to make that point it is sufficient to point out different opinions in one central area of theology. I will then discuss to what degree some of the differences between the magisterial and the radical reformers have been received in the later Baptist tradition, with special emphasis on the Danish context. The Danish Baptist tradition is a good example of how some Baptists have moved from primarily identifying with the Reformed tradition to now identifying with the Anabaptists of the sixteenth century.

I will argue, finally, that rather than trying to identify with one or the other part of the Reformation, the Baptist tradition should be seen as reflecting elements from both. This approach does not attempt to render doctrinal differences insignificant, but rather places them as elements in a greater framework. By acknowledging that doctrinal differences are part of our own history as modern Baptists, we also gain the opportunity of embracing more than just a few elements of Reformation theology. This makes it possible to celebrate the achievements of the magisterial reformers without compromising our appreciation of what we perceive to be important elements of the Anabaptist movements.

## **The Reformation: What Was the Difference Between the Magisterial Reformation and the Anabaptists?**

‘The whole point of the Reformation was...’ Well, what was it? In the traditional Lutheran narrative, which is the predominant one in traditionally Lutheran societies like Denmark, the main theological issue of the Reformation was the question of justification. Often this is formulated in

terms of the so-called exclusive particles like ‘justification by grace alone’ or ‘justification by or through faith alone’. In the popular version, the dichotomy was one between ‘justification by works’ on the one hand and ‘justification by faith’ on the other. It quickly turns out, however, that at the core of the Reformation debates there were certain philosophical and theological assumptions about the sovereignty of grace that must also be taken into consideration.

Erasmus of Rotterdam defended what could be called a humanistic-voluntaristic position on faith and soteriology. In his *De libero arbitrio diatribe sive collatio*, Erasmus argued that human beings have a free will – also when it comes to choosing salvation: ‘By free choice in this place we mean a power of the human will by which a man can apply himself to the things which lead to eternal salvation, or turn away from them.’<sup>3</sup> The equation of divine providence with predetermination, so central to the Augustinian doctrine of predestination, was not biblical, Erasmus argued. It is the will of God to save all, but individual salvation depends on personal response. Martin Luther, on the other hand, argued that ‘free choice is in reality a fiction, or a name without reality. For no one has it in his own power to think a good or bad thought, but everything [...] happens by absolute necessity.’<sup>4</sup>

Luther, against Erasmus, argued in his *De servo arbitrio* that God unconditionally decides whom to love and who will have saving faith and who will not. In philosophical terms the main issue is the relationship between the absolute and the relative. But this was, of course, not merely a philosophical discussion, but a question of what we understand by grace and justification by grace. If salvation depends on our choice, works or even faith, if it is from us, then it is not of grace. Faith is not active, voluntary belief, but a passive reception of Christ’s righteousness.<sup>5</sup> As is well known, Luther also emphasised a forensic idea of justification in which Christians are both justified and sinners at the same time (*simul peccator et justus*) so that our righteousness does not depend on our degree of good will. Many of Luther’s doctrines were affirmed by John Calvin and the subsequent Reformed tradition.

But where did the Anabaptists stand in this discussion? It may be argued that the Anabaptists were not just a radical version of the Lutheran or Zwinglian Reformation, but formed a third alternative that could be

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<sup>3</sup> Erasmus, *De Libero Arbitrio*, trans. and ed. by E. Gordon Rupp, in *Luther and Erasmus: Free Will and Salvation*, E. Gordon Rupp and Philip S. Watson, trans. and ed. (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1969), p. 47.

<sup>4</sup> Martin Luther, *De Servo Arbitrio* (1525), *WA* VII.146.

<sup>5</sup> Martin Luther, *Commentary on Galatians / Selections From His Writing* (Knopf Doubleday, 2011), p. 101.



understood as radicalising elements of Erasmus' emphasis on human free will and discipleship. Following Erasmus, many Anabaptists argued that the great commission in Matthew 28 should be understood as containing a specific order.<sup>6</sup> First, make disciples, then baptise, and then teach. The plausibility of this order was strengthened, in my view, by a voluntaristic conception of free will and the idea of faith as voluntary belief.

In 1527 Balthasar Hubmaier stated his opinion on the debate on the freedom of the human will as he released a work entitled *On the Freedom of the Will which God through his Sent Word offers to all people and thereby gives them the power to become His Children and also the choice to will and to do good, or else to let them remain Children of Wrath which they are by nature*.<sup>7</sup> In his treatise Hubmaier argued that, although the human soul lost its freedom to choose between good and evil after the fall, its capabilities of choice have been restored with Christ. In this way, salvation is of grace, but human beings have the freedom to reject grace or accept and utilise grace.<sup>8</sup> After the restoration of the soul, human beings are free to will and do good, says Hubmaier, who at this point comes close to affirming some kind of soteriological synergism – though one initiated by the grace of God: 'God has created you without your help, but without your help he will not save you', says Hubmaier.<sup>9</sup>

Hence, some degree of synergism arguably came to characterise the Anabaptist position(s) in distinction from the monergism of the magisterial reformers.<sup>10</sup> Though someone like Hans Denck seems to have put less weight on the active exercise of the human will and more weight on passivity or

<sup>6</sup> Abraham Friesen, *Erasmus, the Anabaptists, and the Great Commission* (Eerdmans, 1998), pp. 50ff.

<sup>7</sup> Balthasar Hubmaier, 'Freedom of the Will, I', in J.H. Yoder and H.W. Pipkin, *Classics of the radical reformation, Balthasar Hubmaier* (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1989), pp. 427ff. A follow-up came the same year with the title *The Second book On the Freedom of the Will Of the Human Being In Which it is Testified With Scriptures that God by Means of His Sent Word Gives Power to All People To Become His Children and Freely Entrusts to Them the Choice to Will and to Do Good. Also Thereby Are the Counter Scriptures Of the Opposition Dissolved*. See Balthasar Hubmaier, 'Freedom of the Will, II' in J.H. Yoder and H.W. Pipkin, *Classics of the radical reformation, Balthasar Hubmaier* (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1989), pp. 450ff.

<sup>8</sup> See also Kirk R. MacGregor, 'Hubmaier's Concord of Predestination with Free Will', in *Direction: A Mennonite Brethren Forum* 35, no. 2 (2006), 279-99.

<sup>9</sup> Balthasar Hubmaier, 'Freedom of the Will, I', p. 440. In earlier treatises, such as *On the Christian Baptism of Believers*, Hubmaier expresses a much more monergistic notion of faith. See, for example, Hubmaier, 'Freedom of the Will, I', p. 97.

<sup>10</sup> Something similar was true for someone like Pilgram Marpeck. Klaasen notes: 'by asserting freedom of choice Marpeck rejected the Augustinian doctrine of predestination as it was held by the reformers'. See Walter Klaasen, 'Sin and fear in the thought of Pilgram Marpeck', *Mennonite Quarterly Review* (January 2011) <<https://www.thefreelibrary.com/Sin+and+fear+in+the+thought+of+Pilgram+Marpeck.-a0248265113>> [accessed 20 October 2016] Menno Simons held similar views: 'In general, Anabaptist concern with the problem of free will appears to have been motivated by three considerations. In the first place, God is righteous; therefore, He can in no way be responsible for evil. Secondly, without free will there can be no real repentance, which for Anabaptists was an indispensable element in entering the Christian life. Thirdly, without free will there can be no real commitment to discipleship.' GAMEO – Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online <[http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Free\\_Will](http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Free_Will)> [accessed 12 June 2016]

*Gelassenheit*, he did emphasise the need for human beings to accept grace.<sup>11</sup> Denck could also be said to hold to an idea of justification as something actual rather than something forensic, where righteousness is simply imputed or reckoned.<sup>12</sup> God justifies by actually making just as the believer accepts God's grace. The outward, symbolic expression of this inner, spiritual fact is credo-baptism.

The idea of free will was in many cases based on a classic (Patristic) idea of human beings as being made in the image of God. God is transcendent, but there is a fundamental likeness between God and human beings, at least in spirit.<sup>13</sup> The defence of human free will was, in other words, a defence of the dignity of human beings. But it was also a defence of the dignity of God, a theodicy, to use a later term. Balthasar Hubmaier noted: 'That would be a perfidious God who would invite all people to a supper, offer his mercy to everyone with exalted earnestness, and would yet not want them to come[...]'.<sup>14</sup> In other words, 'if not all people are saved, then it is not God but we who are guilty of that, for he gave his most beloved Son into death for us all'.<sup>15</sup> Only when we by free choice reject God's grace do we encounter the hidden, punishing will of God, Hubmaier argued.<sup>16</sup> When it came to the scope of God's love, God was not for Erasmus and the Anabaptists a capricious stranger who could not be trusted, someone who arbitrarily predestined some to salvation and others to damnation.

A certain biblicism may also have been influential here: If we read in the Bible that it is the will of God that all human beings are saved (1 Timothy 4.10), then we cannot, like Luther, assume a hidden will of God that wills most people to be damned against God's word.<sup>17</sup> God has fully revealed his will to save and we do not have the right to claim, as Luther did, that God is 'not bound by his word'. This belief that God has invited all human beings to salvation but that grace must be accepted by free will arguably also influenced the Anabaptist idea of mission and witnessing.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Hans Denck, *Schriften. T. 1-3, Quellen und Forschungen zur Reformationsgeschichte* 24.6. (ed. Walter Fellman, 1956), II.92.23. Denck can hardly be called a 'humanist', though. See Clarence Bauman, *The Spiritual Legacy of Hans Denck* (Leiden: Brill, 1991), p. 25.

<sup>12</sup> Hans Denck, 1956, II.25.18-19.

<sup>13</sup> Balthasar Hubmaier, 'Freedom of the Will, I', pp. 427ff.

<sup>14</sup> Balthasar Hubmaier, 'Freedom of the Will, II', p. 466.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 470.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 472ff.

<sup>17</sup> Martin Luther, *De Servo Arbitrio* (1525), *WA* 18,685.

<sup>18</sup> Melchior Hoffmann allegedly wrote: '[T]he king of kings excludes no one, nor does he condemn anyone, but commands his servants to go as his messengers and teach all people, heathen, tribes, languages, and nations as it was done in the times of the apostles. Christ has given himself for all people, for each human being, and has paid therefore for the sins of all, and has taken them away and destroyed them and established eternal salvation. And now, the time has come that the word of God should be proclaimed among all nations as a testimony [...]' (Melchior Hoffmann, *Die Ordnantie Godts*) quoted from Wilbert R. Shenk, *Anabaptism and Mission* (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1984), p. 12.

At any rate, in my opinion, the clearest differences between the mainline reformers and the Anabaptists were in their emphasis on the sovereignty of grace on the one hand and human choice and free will on the other. The importance of human choice arguably also played a role in why the Anabaptists emphasised the importance of freedom in matters of religion and the idea of church as an intentional community to a degree that the magisterial reformers did not.

## What Do Baptist Traditions Have to Say About These Issues?

It is no secret that the first English Baptists like John Smyth and Thomas Helwys seem to have held beliefs reminiscent of Balthasar Hubmaier and later Anabaptists as they explicitly rejected the traditional idea of predestination in favour of more Arminian ideas of a general atonement and the free will of human beings to reject or accept grace. Smyth and Helwys, who associated with Mennonites in Amsterdam, are reported to have moved away from the Calvinism associated with the English Puritans to a more Arminian view, thereby laying the foundation for the so-called General Baptists.<sup>19</sup>

This did not, however, make the Baptists after Smyth and Helwys full-blown Arminians or Mennonites. According to L.D. Kliever, the followers of Helwys did not become Mennonites in doctrine or practice, but kept a moderate Calvinism as they returned to England from Amsterdam.<sup>20</sup> Also, Stephen Wright has pointed out that some early General Baptists, such as Thomas Lambe, held an idea of general atonement while supporting some form of Calvinistic notions on election against Arminianism.<sup>21</sup> An even more radically Reformed notion of predestination and election became a part of Baptist theology as what would be known as the Particular Baptist denomination was founded in the 1640s. Thus, John Howard Shakespeare argued that the Calvinists were ‘the real forerunners’ of the Baptist denomination, while James Leo Garret notes that ‘Independency left its imprint on the Particular Baptists through its Dortian Calvinism and its congregational polity’.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>19</sup> See Ian M. Randall, *Communities of Conviction* (Schwarzenfeld: Neufeld Verlag, 2009), p. 13.

<sup>20</sup> L. D. Kliever, ‘General Baptist Origins: The Question of Anabaptist Influence’, *Mennonite Quarterly Review* (October 1962), p. 300.

<sup>21</sup> Stephen Wright, *The Early English Baptists, 1603-49* (Suffolk; Rochester, NY: Boydell & Brewer, 2006), p. 99. Whether or not Calvin himself believed in a general or a limited atonement is not clear. John Briggs, ‘The Influence of Calvinism on Seventeenth-Century English Baptists’, *Baptist History and Heritage*, Spring 2004, Vol.39 (2), p. 9; Ian J. Shaw, *High Calvinists in Action: Calvinism and the City, Manchester and London, 1810-60* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 12ff.

<sup>22</sup> John Howard Shakespeare, *Baptist and Congregational Pioneers* (London: National Council of Evangelical Free Churches, 1907), p. 180; James Leo Garret, *Baptist Theology: A Four-Century Study* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2009), pp. 16ff, pp. 23ff. The earliest Particular Baptist confession, the London Confession from 1644, was based on the Congregationalist True Confession from 1596.

Glen Stassen has made the case, though, that the Particular Baptists derived much of their thinking and practice from Dutch Mennonites.<sup>23</sup> Stassen points out clear similarities between Menno Simons' *Foundation Book* and the Particular Baptist confession of 1644. James Renihan, Ian Birch and others have criticised Stassen's claims.<sup>24</sup> But even if Stassen is right in his claim, the Particular Baptists arguably formed a theological tradition quite different from the continental Anabaptists. The Particular Baptists translated Menno Simons' voluntaristic language into a theocentric one, says Stassen:

For Menno the emphasis is on the act of the believer in Christ, expressing his desire to be baptized with Christ in his death, burial, and resurrection. The language is primarily ethical. For the Baptists the emphasis is on the act of God in Christ, with whom we were and shall be baptized into death, burial, and resurrection. The language is primarily theological.<sup>25</sup>

Menno Simons, says Stassen, was an Anabaptist, while the Particular Baptists remained Calvinists.

Even if there may have been contacts and influence in thought, for the early Particular Baptists the theology behind the demand for credo-baptism arguably differed from that of Hubmaier, Denck, and Menno Simons, as the exercise of human choice played a very different role in the largely monergistic theology of the Particular Baptists. A work such as *Justification by Christ Alone* by Samuel Richardson, who co-signed the London Confession from 1644, clearly reflects a radical monergistic idea that justification comes before faith and that justification cannot for this reason in any way depend on the exercise of human will and choice.<sup>26</sup> Richardson strongly emphasised a forensic idea of justification, as he argued that the righteous are still sinners, and he would have agreed, I think, with Luther's argument against the Anabaptists that if baptism is based on our own faith as the ground of our hope, then the validity of our baptism is never sure, since we cannot be sure of our own faith.<sup>27</sup> It is neither faith nor baptism that is the ground of our hope, but Christ alone. We are justified by Christ alone, said Samuel Richardson, and added that when Paul talks of justification by faith, he by 'faith' simply means Christ.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Glen Stassen, 'Anabaptist Influence in the Origin of the Particular Baptists', *The Mennonite Quarterly Review* Oct 1, 1962, Vol.36 (4), pp. 322ff.

<sup>24</sup> James Renihan, 'An Examination of the Possible Influence of Menno Simons' *Foundation Book* upon the Particular Baptist Confession of 1644', *American Baptist Quarterly* 15.3 (September 1996), p. 199; Ian Birch, 'Christ their Head and King,' *Particular Baptist Ecclesiology in the First London Confession, 1644* (Unpublished PhD-dissertation), p. 41.

<sup>25</sup> Glen Stassen, 1962, p. 344.

<sup>26</sup> See Samuel Richardson, *Justification by Christ Alone* (London, 1647).

<sup>27</sup> LW 40,250; See also Samuel Richardson, 'An Answer to a Treatise, entitled The Doctrine of the Antinomians' (Argument 9) in *Divine Consolations* (1649).

<sup>28</sup> Samuel Richardson, *Justification by Christ Alone*.

In the eighteenth century the monergistic view of grace became evident in the so-called ‘Hyper-Calvinism’ of Baptist ministers and theologians such as John Skepp and John Gill.<sup>29</sup> For these theologians, the fact that human beings do not contribute to their own faith, meant that there could be no question of inviting unbelievers to repentance. Other views took over, of course, as Baptists adopted a more missional approach. But even many Baptists who, following the ‘great awakenings’, emphasised mission, continued to hold strong monergistic beliefs.<sup>30</sup>

## Examples from the Danish Context

‘Origins’ are one issue; how later Baptists perceived their origins is another matter. For a long period, Baptists were associated with monergistic views and ideas of forensic justification with imputed righteousness, similar to those of the Reformed tradition, not only in the English context, but also in Germany and Denmark, with J.G. Oncken and Julius Købner as important examples.

As many Reformed Baptists before him, Julius Købner combined a strong emphasis on religious liberty with the high view of God’s sovereignty and grace from the Reformed tradition.<sup>31</sup> For Købner the emphasis on religious liberty and credo-baptism did not follow from an idea of free will and the ability of human beings to choose for themselves, as it did for many Anabaptists. On the contrary, the emphasis on religious liberty and credo-baptism followed from the idea that God, and only God, chooses for human beings, and that credo-baptism is the result in time rather than the beginning or condition of God’s eternal choice.<sup>32</sup>

Købner is reported to have said that he highly esteemed Calvin and preferred the Reformed church over the Lutheran (which had, at this point, to some degree adopted the view that grace can be resisted), and that Baptists agree with the Reformed church in most respects.<sup>33</sup> When Købner in 1841 made his report about the awakening in Denmark to the Baptists in London, his first complaint was not about the baptismal practice of the Lutherans, but that most held what he saw to be an Arminian notion of free will:

<sup>29</sup> See Peter Toon, *The Emergence of Hyper-Calvinism in English Nonconformity, 1689-1765* (London: Oliver Tree, 1967), pp. 70ff.

<sup>30</sup> James Leo Garret, 2009, pp. 153ff.

<sup>31</sup> Important sources for Købner’s views are the conference protocols from the period when Købner was leader of the Danish Baptists.

<sup>32</sup> See Julius Købner, *Hvori bestaar Daaben? og hvem skal døbes?* (Slagelse: N. Nielsen, 1861). Compare with John Gill, *Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, p. 914.

<sup>33</sup> Julius Købner, according to Niels Larsen, *De danske Baptistmenigheders Forenings-Konferents, holdt i den jetsmarkske Menighed den 30te Juni og 1ste og 2den Juli 1870* (1870), p. 25.



The essence of Christianity, justification by Christ, and not by works, they clearly recognised and admitted; but they were perfectly in the dark on the sovereignty of God in the free choice of the objects of his redeeming grace; and, like the Lutheran Church, were Arminian in sentiment.<sup>34</sup>

It is not clear whether Købner at this point was aware that the founder of the first Danish Baptist congregation, P.C. Mønster, also held an Arminian view of the human will. Mønster identified with the General Baptists rather than the Particular Baptists and the Reformed tradition.<sup>35</sup> This, however, did not make him identify with Reformation period Anabaptists. P.C. Mønster, in his defence during trials after his baptism in 1839, asserted that he was not an Anabaptist and that he agreed with most points in the Lutheran *Confessio Augustana* (CA) from 1530. This may be due to the fact that Anabaptists ('Anabaptister') were condemned by the CA and that Anabaptist practices, by a royal rescript from 1745, were explicitly forbidden on Danish territory, except in 'free towns' such as Frederiksstad and Altona where Anabaptists, Mennonites, Arminians, and others were allowed to reside as long as they did not make proselytes.<sup>36</sup>

P.C. Mønster was not the only Danish Baptist to disagree with the Reformed theology of Oncken's congregation in Hamburg. In many years following, discussions on election, free will and grace resulted in controversies among Danish Baptists. The Baptist congregation in Aalborg rewrote the confession of the Hamburg Baptists as it was about to be distributed in Denmark in 1847. The Hamburg confession contained clearly Reformed teachings on election which were omitted in the version from Aalborg. Købner, in a letter to N.O. Føltved, the leader of the congregation in Aalborg, seems to have accepted that the congregation identified with the views of the General Baptists who denied the doctrine of election. But Købner strongly criticised what he perceived to be the divisive attitude of the congregation in Aalborg.<sup>37</sup>

These controversies erupted a second time in the 1860s. An important participator in the discussion, siding for Købner's doctrine of election, was

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<sup>34</sup> Julius Købner, *Revival of Religion in Denmark; Including an Account of the Rise and Present State of the Baptist Churches in that Kingdom* (London: Houlston & Stoneman, 1841). Though Martin Luther obviously did not believe in the possibility of rejecting grace, this belief became widespread in subsequent Lutheran Orthodoxy.

<sup>35</sup> Like many Danish Baptists after him, P.C. Mønster was at first inspired by the priest and hymn-writer N.F.S. Grundtvig, an important character in newer Danish church history. Grundtvig was much inspired by the early Greek church fathers, and his influence has resulted in views on scripture, sin and salvation quite distinct from the ideas about total depravity and irresistible grace which influenced the Reformed Baptists.

<sup>36</sup> N. Lindberg, *Trosfrihed* (Copenhagen: Karl Schønbergs Forlag, 1881), p. 12; Bent Hylleberg et al., *Et kirkesamfund bliver til* (Brand: Føltveds, 1989), p. 22. Thanks to Bent Hylleberg for reminding me of the perhaps somewhat pragmatic reasons for P.C. Mønster's reluctance to identify with Anabaptists.

<sup>37</sup> See Julius Købner: *Fem breve til N.O. Føltved og menigheden i Aalborg om Baptisternes trosbekendelse fra 1847 (1851-1852)* <<http://baptistteologi.dk/>> [accessed 12 July 2016]

Søren Hansen who in 1869 released a book on the doctrine of election.<sup>38</sup> Søren Hansen introduced his book with a polemical remark, though without any specific addressee: ‘Since so many in our days write so much about what human beings must do for God, allow me to write a few word about what God has done for human beings.’ Søren Hansen adds that the doctrine of election is the ‘most unshakeable pillar of Christianity’.<sup>39</sup> He then builds up his argument with frequent citations from authors from the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries. Martin Luther is quoted frequently, but surprisingly Søren Hansen does not once quote Calvin. Søren Hansen rejects double predestination, but makes it very clear that we are fully incapable of choosing grace ourselves and that God saves the elect against their will.<sup>40</sup>

In 1870 the Baptist preacher Niels Hansen released a book against the perceived Calvinism of Søren Hansen and Julius Købner. A remark made by Købner, which seems to have shocked Niels Hansen, was Købner’s claim that if God had asked him whether he wanted to be reborn, he would assuredly have answered “No!”.<sup>41</sup> Niels Hansen argued that Calvinism was a sort of golden calf (pun intended – Niels Hansen calls it ‘kalv-i-nisme’, i.e., ‘calf-i-nism’), and that it placed God’s decree of election above Christ’s atoning sacrifice, which Niels Hansen understood in terms of what would later be called the ‘Christus Victor’ view of the atonement rather than penal substitution.<sup>42</sup> Against the doctrine of election Niels Hansen emphasised the generality of the atonement and the reliability of God’s love, as well as the responsibility of human beings in choosing or accepting grace and not backsliding from grace.<sup>43</sup> Niels Hansen added that God has revealed his will to save all, so that there is not now some hidden God whose will we do not know.<sup>44</sup> That not all are saved is due to the fact that human beings can reject grace, says Niels Hansen: ‘the decisive in his eternal destiny has been put in his own hand’.<sup>45</sup>

Traditional Protestant notions of sin and grace were also attacked from a somewhat different angle as perfectionist beliefs (‘fuldkommenheds-læren’) were propagated by a Swedish missionary named Helge Aaggesson. Aaggesson allegedly taught that Christians cannot be sinful and holy at the same time (thus denying the Lutheran doctrine of *simul peccator et justus*), and that the condition for entering the kingdom is to do the will of God.

<sup>38</sup> See Søren Hansen: *Om Udvælgelsen til Salighed* (Aalborg, 1869).

<sup>39</sup> Søren Hansen, 1869, p. 1.

<sup>40</sup> Søren Hansen, 1869, pp. 15ff, p. 19.

<sup>41</sup> ‘Gud har ikke spurgt mig, om jeg vilde fødes; saaledes har han eiheller spurgt mig, om jeg vilde gjenfødes. Eller spurgte han mig, saa svarede jeg Nei!’ . Købner, according to Niels Hansen, 1869, p. 34. See also Niels Hansen, *Hedelærken om Forudbestemmelsen eller Calvinismens hemmelighed afsløret* (1870), p. 18.

<sup>42</sup> Niels Hansen, 1870, p. 26.

<sup>43</sup> Niels Hansen, *Om Frafald fra Naaden* (1867).

<sup>44</sup> Niels Hansen, 1870, pp. 6-7.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

When Paul was complaining about his incapability in doing good he was talking of his state before conversion, Aaggeson is reported to have said.<sup>46</sup> Though Aaggeson seems to have believed that perfection at least to some degree happened by the grace of God, his beliefs clearly distinguished him from Julius Købner, who emphasised that Christians are fully sinners in so far as they are considered from the standpoint of the old Adam, but fully righteous and holy in so far as they are considered from the standpoint of the new creation in Christ.<sup>47</sup>

In response to the attacks from Niels Hansen and others who rejected orthodox Protestant beliefs, Julius Købner eagerly defended a predestinarian idea of election, and the persistent sinfulness of the human will apart from grace. For Købner, baptism by immersion was the fruit of obedience to Christ and following from being baptised in the Holy Spirit.<sup>48</sup> Spiritual rebirth is the exclusive work of God to which no human effort can contribute or prevent. Faith is not a result of human choice but of God's election, even if the faithful will have to decide to be baptised after being reborn. Købner cannot, however, be called a Particular Baptist in the strict sense, I think, as he clearly defended the belief in a general atonement.<sup>49</sup> Købner's belief was that Christ died for all, but that only the elect will have saving faith. What is clear is Købner's insistence that God not only saves us without our will and effort, but against our will.<sup>50</sup>

Not all early Danish Baptists were completely reluctant to identify with the Anabaptists of the Reformation, as some expressed ideas reminiscent of so-called Landmarkism, claiming the existence of a certain ecclesiological succession of Baptist churches. Though it is not certain that Danish Baptists gained their ideas from American Landmarkism, Baptists such as the Danish-Norwegian preacher Frederik L. Rymker did express the view that there is some sort of succession from the early New Testament churches through medieval dissenters from Rome such as the Waldenses, and certain Anabaptists.<sup>51</sup> At the same time Rymker clearly denied any

<sup>46</sup> See Niels Larsen, *De danske Baptistmenigheders forenings-Konferents, holdt i Veile Menighed den 30te Juni og 1ste Juli 1871* (1871), pp. 37ff.

<sup>47</sup> Julius Købner: 'Worin besteht die Heiligung des Christen? Beantwortung nach der Heiligen Schrift' in *Um die Gemeinde. Ausgewählte Schriften* (Berlin: hrsg. und kommentiert von Hermann Gieselbusch, 1927), p. 185.

<sup>48</sup> Julius Købner, 1861, p. 12.

<sup>49</sup> Købner could, perhaps, be called a 'Fullerist' in this regard, as Andrew Fuller argued that Christ's atonement is sufficient for the salvation of the whole world, were the whole world to believe in him.

<sup>50</sup> Julius Købner, 1869, p. 27.

<sup>51</sup> See Frederik L. Rymker, *Frederik L. Rymkers Bemærkninger over V. Birkedals Stridsord imod Baptismen, samt Mag. Viborgs Tale om Barnedaaben og Baptisternes Daab, sammenlignet med Christi Daab, Hans Befaling til Apostlerne og Deres Udførelse af Samme, talte i Stige den 29de Juni 1851* (Odense, 1851). This Baptist successionist ecclesiology was developed from 1851 by Americans such as James Robinson Graves and Ben M. Bogard. As such it is not likely to have been what inspired Frederik L. Rymker who, the same year, expressed views similar to Landmarkism, but it is, of course, theoretically possible that he had read Graves. See James Garrett, *Baptist Theology: A Four-Century Study* (Macon:



affinity with the ideas and practices of the Anabaptists of Münster.<sup>52</sup> It could be argued that Rymker's point was not that there is a direct link between these dissenting groups – such as the Anabaptists and Baptists – but only that the dissenting groups often were the real representatives of true New Testament Christianity.<sup>53</sup> His claim that the different dissenting groups have 'touched each other in time so that there is a complete succession from the time when the Roman church was corrupted' does, however, place Rymker close to Landmarkist beliefs.<sup>54</sup>

But in general it seems evident that most early Danish Baptists were reluctant, to say the least, about identifying with, not to say *as*, Anabaptists. In this they were perfectly in line with other denominational Baptists. This changed slowly, however, as Danish Baptists gained a more independent identity during the twentieth century. P. Olsen, who was the leading Danish Baptist theologian of the early twentieth century, argued that we cannot resolve the debate on grace, free will, and providence theoretically: 'Only when we by Jesus Christ have entered a communion with God do we learn from personal experience what the providence of God really is.'<sup>55</sup> P. Olsen, who affirmed that Baptists belong to the Reformed part of the church, also affirmed Købner's claim that baptism is not something in which we are to obtain God's grace, but a confession of what God has already done.<sup>56</sup> In an essay on Martin Luther on the occasion of the 400-years celebration of the Reformation in 1917, P. Olsen expressed a high appreciation of Luther, though he argued that in regard to issues such as baptism and ecclesiology, Anabaptists such as Balthasar Hubmaier were preferable.<sup>57</sup> We are all deeply indebted to Luther, but when it comes to baptism we should not look to Luther but to the Anabaptists who were ahead of their time in that respect.<sup>58</sup> The ideas of the Anabaptists live on in the Baptist congregation, says P. Olsen, without, however, going deeper into the theological principles behind the Anabaptists' beliefs in credo-baptism.

When the official celebration of the Reformation in Denmark was held in 1936, the Danish Baptist scholar Frederik Bredahl Petersen released a pamphlet in which he argued that, even if there were not any Anabaptists in

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Mercer University Press, 2009), p. 213. Købner was also clearly interested in the Waldensians. See Julius Købner, *Die Waldenser. Ein dramatisches Gemälde mit lyrischen Randzeichnungen* (Hamburg: J.G. Oncken, 1861).

<sup>52</sup> Frederik Rymker, 1851, p. 17

<sup>53</sup> It should be noted that the Lutheran church in Denmark did not take over Apostolic Succession, as new superintendens was installed. Rymker, 1851, pp. 15ff.

<sup>54</sup> See Frederik Rymker, 1851, p. 16.

<sup>55</sup> P. Olsen, 1925, p. 43.

<sup>56</sup> P. Olsen, according to Bent Hylleberg et al., *Et kirkesamfund bliver til* (1989), p. 226; P. Olsen, 'Den kristne Daab' in *Kun nåde – udvalgte tekster af P. Olsen* (Copenhagen: Apophasis, 2016), pp. 167ff.

<sup>57</sup> P. Olsen, *Martin Luther og hans reformation: Et lejlighedsskrift* (Dansk Baptist-Forlag, 1917), pp. 23ff.

<sup>58</sup> P. Olsen, 1917, p. 35.

Denmark at the time of the Reformation, traces of Anabaptists in Denmark can be found from the 1550s onwards (as was also the case in England for a short period of time). F.B. Petersen does not use the derogatory term Anabaptist, but the more neutral 'Døber' (similar to the German 'Täufer', or the English 'Baptist'), and argues that modern Baptists as descendants ('arvtagere') after 'Døberne' should participate in celebrating the Reformation by deepening the emphasis on the New Testament as the foundational source of Christianity.<sup>59</sup>

## Overcoming Conflict Without Ignoring Differences

In general, it could be said that the Baptists of the nineteenth century had much in common with Anabaptist ecclesiology, but that they arrived there from a very different perspective.<sup>60</sup> Only in recent years has a new and more in-depth interest in the Anabaptists gained a stronghold in a Danish context.<sup>61</sup> We are not here dealing with some sort of Neo-Landmarkism, of course. The new interest in possible Anabaptist roots is much more likely to be derived from an ecumenical engagement with other traditions than from Baptist exclusivism. This interest is, not surprisingly, similar to that which can be found in the American context as well as in other European countries. It is not least the works of especially John Howard Yoder, Stanley Hauerwas, and James McClendon that have led to a higher appreciation of the Anabaptists among Baptists.<sup>62</sup>

Beliefs resembling the synergism of some Anabaptists also seem to have gained ground in many denominations, including Baptist ones, as such things as justification and sanctification are increasingly seen as parts of a process to which human beings can contribute by engaging in certain performativities and practices of faith.<sup>63</sup> In this approach, there is a tendency

<sup>59</sup> See Frederik Bredahl Petersen, *Døberne i Danmark paa Reformationstiden* (København: Dansk Baptist-Forlag, 1936?), pp. 14-15.

<sup>60</sup> Moreover, while most Anabaptists seem to have baptised by pouring, Baptists, starting with the Particular Baptists, quickly introduced baptism by full immersion. The Anabaptists' radical attitude to political issues – whether it was withdrawal or revolution – was also eschewed by most Baptists.

<sup>61</sup> In *Baptisternes håndbog 2015* ('The Baptist Handbook 2015'). In a section on the values of the Danish Baptist Union, references are made to Anabaptists and the seven core distinctives of 'small-b Baptists'. See Torsten Wendel Hansen (ed.), *Baptisternes håndbog 2015* (Baptistkirken i Danmark, 2015), p. 63. See also the webpage <<http://www.anabaptist.dk>> [accessed 20 October 2016]

<sup>62</sup> In 2005 the Baptist Union in Denmark published John Howard Yoder's *Body Politics*. See John Howard Yoder and Ole Lundegaard (tr.), *Kirke med krop, kirken som håbets tegn i en splittet verden* (Frederiksberg, 2005).

<sup>63</sup> See Hanne Kiel (ed.), *Baptist.dk: I praksis* (København: Baptistkirken i Danmark, 2016), pp. 3ff. This is also true internationally. According to a survey by LifeWay Research for Ligonier Ministries, 56% of American self-identified Evangelicals believe that 'People must contribute their own effort for personal salvation.' See Kevin P. Emmert, 'New Poll Finds Evangelicals' Favorite Heresies' in *Christianity Today*

to take the Pauline ‘justification by faith’ to mean being justified by living a faithful life after the example of Christ (as πίστις is understood as faithfulness or obedience), which may be why emphasis on such things as ‘discipleship’ or ‘following Christ’ has become central, as modern Baptists look to the Anabaptists of the Reformation as a source of inspiration.<sup>64</sup> Forms of so-called New Calvinism have, however, also gained a presence in what seems to be a partial response to this tendency.<sup>65</sup>

James McClendon’s claim was that Baptists have too often failed to appreciate what is the particular strength of the Baptist tradition. Instead, Baptists have engaged in discussions foreign to their tradition, such as that on free will and the sovereignty of grace.<sup>66</sup> Theological reflection, McClendon argued, has for Baptists too often been defined in terms of ‘the Calvinist-Arminian polarity’, rather than ‘on terms provided by earlier Anabaptist motifs’. The above examples show, however, that these discussions were not something ‘foreign’ to the Anabaptists.<sup>67</sup> The Anabaptist emphasis on discipleship and New Testament ethics cannot, I believe, be detached from their emphasis on the importance of free will and human choice. But neither was the debate on grace and free will a strange element to early Particular Baptists or later nineteenth century Baptists like Julius K  bner.

For K  bner it was central to his personal history and biography of faith that he did not choose God, but that God chose him.<sup>68</sup> Nevertheless, this did not prevent him from emphasising the need to keep peace despite doctrinal differences. During yet another discussion on grace and free will K  bner remarked:

It is my highest priority to warn against quibbling. Church history contains many battles concerning opinions, and immediately after the Reformation there came a time with much fighting about doctrines. Everything had to be orthodox and precisely right in that respect – but besides that people forgot

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(October 28, 2014) <<http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2014/october-web-only/new-poll-finds-evangelicals-favorite-heresies.html?start=2>> [accessed 9 July 2016]

<sup>64</sup> Another influence may be the so-called ‘new perspective(s) on Paul’. A growing interest in Eastern Orthodox themes such as *theosis* is also present, and virtue ethics in contemporary philosophy also seems to be popular. An influential example of some sort of post-modern version of Eastern Orthodoxy is the Swedish Pentecostal pastor Peter Halldorf, who is popular in Scandinavian free churches. See Dale M. Coulter, ‘Surprised by Sacraments’, *First Things* (21 November 2013).

<sup>65</sup> Rasmus Jonstrup, ‘Et valg – eller udvalgt?’ in Hanne Kiel (ed.), *Baptist.dk, no. 3: Du har et valg* (K  benhavn: Baptistkirken i Danmark, 2015), pp. 9ff.

<sup>66</sup> James McClendon, *Systematic Theology I – Ethics* (Waco, TX.: Baylor University Press, 2012), p. 25.

<sup>67</sup> See also Hans Denck, ‘On Whether God is the Cause of Evil’ in Clarence Bauman, *The Spiritual Legacy of Hans Denck: Interpretation and Translation of Key Texts* (Leiden: Brill, 1991), pp. 72ff.

<sup>68</sup> See K  bner in Niels Larsen, *De danske Baptist-Menigheders Forenings-Konferents, holdt i Oure Menigheds kapel den 1ste, 2den og 3die Juli 1869* (Nakskov, 1869), pp. 29-30.

the heart, and the Christian life was not mentioned. The main concern is to be reborn and to love Christ.<sup>69</sup>

Though Købner did not succeed in keeping the fragments of the Danish Baptist denomination together, his hope clearly was that it would be possible to embrace a diverse variety of views inside the denomination. Købner accepted different opinions on grace and the sovereignty of God, as long as there was no denial of the atoning sacrifice of Christ. This belief seems to have been the bulwark of orthodoxy for Købner.

P.C. Mønster went even further when he wrote that, ‘It is a principle of our Baptist denomination not to have a written statement of faith, whether as excerpts of or based on the New Testament, which is our only rule of faith.’<sup>70</sup> Mønster added that confession of faith should not consist in repeating certain formulas, but in recounting one’s life history. While this approach did not help Mønster to keep peace between himself and the Reformed faction of Danish Baptists, it does suggest a useful take on the Baptist tradition similar to that suggested by contemporary proponents of the ‘narrative’ approach to theology and church, such as that suggested by the idea of ‘small-b baptists’. This is not to say that doctrinal differences can be overcome by a contextual or narrative approach, as if truth could be relativised by telling a story, but only that the conflict generated by doctrinal differences can to some degree be overcome by placing differences in a larger framework.

By understanding our own tradition as part of a larger narrative, in which a diverse variety of different opinions and convictions have their place, Baptists can appreciate their heritage from the radical as well as the magisterial Reformation. From the radical Reformation the most important contribution may have been the emphasis on autonomy and freedom from worldly powers in matters of faith – and, I would add, the insistence on the unlimited scope of God’s love and the reliability of scripture saying that it is the will of God to save all human beings. The task of Baptists today could be to make the case that the celebrated ideas of religious liberty did not result from the efforts of the magisterial reformers, but were a product of the radical Reformation and the free church movements.<sup>71</sup>

The contemporary tendency to prioritise practice over doctrine risks, however, resulting in a forgetfulness of the importance of grace. For this

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<sup>69</sup> Julius Købner, according to Niels Larsen, *De danske Baptist-Menigheders forenings-Conferents, holdt i Kjøbenhavn den 1ste Juni 1866* (Nakskov, 1866), p. 26.

<sup>70</sup> P.C. Mønster, according to Hylleberg, et al., 1989, p. 22.

<sup>71</sup> To be sure, Martin Luther and others had already spoken out against the use of violence in matters of faith. Luther wrote: ‘Here God’s Word must strive; if that does not accomplish the end it will remain unaccomplished through secular power, though it fill the world with blood.’ Eventually the Reformation did end in secular powers filling, if not the world, then at least great parts of Europe with blood.

reason, I find it important that Baptists today keep in mind how the Lutheran and Reformed tradition shaped Baptist thought, not least as it was radicalised by seventeenth to eighteenth century Particular Baptists. The most important contribution of the magisterial Reformation was, I believe, the emphasis on the unconditionality of grace and the notion of justification by grace alone through faith alone – and probably also the rather realistic view on justification and human morality. These are important elements in the Baptist tradition that should not be forgotten. Remembering this part of Baptist heritage should also lead to an awareness of the indebtedness to the Lutheran and Reformed traditions.

## Conclusion

In the Danish context Baptists are sometimes met by regret and apologies from Lutherans for what happened after the Reformation – which seems unnecessary, since Danish Baptists have neither a direct historical nor a doctrinal fellowship with sixteenth century Anabaptists, even if many identify with elements of that tradition. But it seems that much of the fuss about the Reformation is really Luther fuss, and not so much an interest in the larger picture. Baptists could, of course, try to widen the picture by insisting on the need to commemorate the Anabaptist movements and others by publicly identifying as a living product of that tradition. In my view, however, this is not always the right course to take.

By not identifying too narrowly with one or more Anabaptist strains of the Reformation, modern Baptists have the opportunity of identifying with a broader range of Reformation causes and profiles: Luther *and* Hubmaier, Calvin *and* Menno Simons. As Glen Stassen puts it: ‘Recovering both our Anabaptist and our Calvinist heritages, with each correcting or deepening the other, can be the way to a more profound Baptist identity.’<sup>72</sup> This is not equal to saying that we can unproblematically hold opposing beliefs, but only that opposing beliefs must be rightly placed in their right context.

Baptists have the opportunity, or at least the possibility, to position themselves as an ecumenical denomination by embracing elements of the Reformation tradition(s) that have often been considered as irreconcilable. The narrative perspective on faith and theology implied by the notion of ‘small b-baptists’ and similar ideas makes this possible – if we are careful not to make a too direct link between Baptists and the Anabaptist movements. The Baptist approach to the Reformation jubilee should, of

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<sup>72</sup> Glen Stassen, ‘Revisioning Baptist Identity by naming Our Origin and Character Rightly’, *Baptist History and Heritage*, Spring 1998, p. 47.

course, not be one of bitter sentiments towards mainline Protestant churches. Rather, it should consist in a wider perspective in which we simultaneously celebrate the contributions of the magisterial Reformation as well as other traditions. In other words, Baptists could and should celebrate the Reformation – in all its diversity.

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# Faith and Art: Reforming Perspectives

Graham Sparkes

Those Reformed, radical, and dissenting church traditions that grew out of the Reformation movements of the sixteenth century, including Baptists, have generally held deep suspicions about the presence of visual art in church buildings designed for worship. They have taken their lead from Calvin and his theological objections to images. However, Luther expressed rather different views on the significance of the visual, as shown by his close relationship with the artist Lucas Cranach, and if Baptists had been more influenced by Luther and less so by Calvin, they might have discovered the value of learning to see the faith.

## Key Words

Reformation, Art, Wittenberg Altarpiece, Puritan, Baptist

## Introduction

The history of the relationship between Christian faith and the visual arts is both complex and problematic. While there have been those who have defended paintings as a source of spiritual life and growth as well as beauty, others have tended to regard them as a dangerous distraction to the Christian community and capable of leading a person into error. At times the arguments have been long and fierce, often leading to violent destruction, and the fiercest disputes have centred on the appropriateness – or otherwise – of imaging the divine, and the use of images such as these in church.

The Byzantine Empire witnessed many of the early conflicts that took place. Official support for Christianity by the Emperor Constantine in 313 CE led to the construction of buildings for public worship and, as a consequence, the opportunity for highly visible works of art to be created. The mosaics to be found in the Italian city of Ravenna date back to the fifth and sixth centuries, and are wonderful examples of the flowering of early Byzantine art. But events took a very different turn when Emperor Leo III came to power in 717 CE. He ordered the destruction of religious art, banning the use of images in worship for reasons that remain somewhat obscure, and his successor, Constantine V, convened a church synod at Hiereia in 752 CE to confirm the policy and give it theological justification. The various waves of iconoclasm that marked out this period finally came to an end with a decree in 843 CE declaring in favour of the use of images, and it is worth



noting that ‘The churches under the patriarch of Constantinople still celebrate this event every year on the Feast of Orthodoxy, the first Sunday of Lent, by a triumphal procession of images.’<sup>1</sup>

However, if the Orthodox Church has one story to tell of the continuing relationship between art and faith, other Christian traditions have quite another story. For Baptists who trace their roots back to the outcomes of the Protestant Reformation in Europe, the idea that images should be celebrated has never been a popular one.

## Art under Suspicion

It is suggested that the most widespread and far-reaching changes to the appearance of Christian art and architecture, and the greatest reconsideration of the place of art and images within Christian observance, occurred as a result of the religious reforms in sixteenth-century Europe.<sup>2</sup> The Protestant Reformation in Europe produced a further wave of iconoclasm that was to have a profound impact on the development of many radical church movements. The reasons for the rejection of the visual were many and varied, often intertwined with those ideas that inspired the Reformers at the outset, and reflective of the particular religious and social context of the time.

There were certainly clearly articulated theological grounds for opposition to the presence of art in churches. The commandment that ‘Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image’<sup>3</sup> was used by early reformers as the scriptural basis for their beliefs and actions: God is beyond imagining and any attempt to image the divine is to be condemned. What mattered for faith was the Word and the Sacrament; these alone could properly focus attention on God; images were open to the charge of idolatry. In his pamphlet ‘On the Removal of Images’, Andreas Karlstadt, who led the removal and destruction of all visual images in Wittenberg’s City Church during Luther’s absence in early 1522, argued from that text and claimed that once pictures are placed in a church – or even worse, on the altar – then they inevitably take the place of God and become the object of worship.<sup>4</sup> They may be attempts to image God or to image the saints, but either way they will deceive and take honour from the one who truly deserves our honour.

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<sup>1</sup> J. Gouillard, ‘Iconoclasm’, in *New Catholic Encyclopedia* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America, 1967), vol.7, pp. 327-9.

<sup>2</sup> Beth Williamson, *Christian Art: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 90.

<sup>3</sup> Exodus 20.3.

<sup>4</sup> See Carter Lindberg, *The European Reformations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996) pp. 93-96 for a discussion of Karlstadt’s views. They are also explored at length in Joseph Koerner, *The Reformation of the Image* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), particularly in chapters 6, 7, and 9.



Alongside such arguments from theology and Scripture, there were also deep concerns about the ways in which art had come to be used – and abused – by the church. If a key conviction of the reformers was that ‘good works’ could not gain you merit with God, then clearly those who invested heavily in art for just such a purpose were to be condemned, and the art with them. The presence of images of saints, together with their shrines and relics, had become a dominant feature of many churches, and invariably such art was commissioned by those with power and money who were glad to pay for intercessions to be said on their behalf. Thus, art represented the kind of corruption and excessive wealth that had made the church ripe for reform. In this sense, images were symbolic of the old order. To see them fall, to bring about their destruction and burning, was to participate in a ritual that affirmed the triumph of the new reforming movement sweeping through Europe.

If we need to recognise that the voiced objections to the presence of visual images in churches were prompted by a number of different concerns, we also need to recognise that there was nothing uniform about the responses to these concerns. On the one hand, there were places where not only images but anything decorative or valuable was stripped away in an attempt to affirm free access to grace as available to all. On the other hand, there were churches where very little changed and images were allowed to remain as part of the worshipping life of the community.<sup>5</sup> While it might be fair to say that as a general rule, Reformation worship grew out of a suspicion of art, all sorts of factors determined the precise attitudes and actions taken by the rulers and people in a particular town or city. And that was also true of the great reformers themselves.

## **Calvin and Zwingli**

When Calvin first arrived in Geneva, reform was already underway, including the removal and destruction of images. But the overthrow of what had been merely left a vacuum waiting to be filled, and it was not until his return in 1541 that reform began to be properly embedded in the life and worship of the city. By that time Calvin had published the first edition of the ‘Institutes of the Christian Religion’, and set out very clearly his resistance to images and the theology that supported such a view. Humanity’s ultimate objective is to know God, he argued, and though the Fall may have corrupted our knowledge, God has given the gift of Scripture to guide and teach. It is

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<sup>5</sup> See Euan Cameron, *The European Reformation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991). Cameron explores how different towns, cities, and regions responded to the Reformation, and the different political and social as well as religious factors that were in play.

the Word that offers a firm foundation for knowing God, even though there are those who have tried to give God visible form.

Seeing that this brutish stupidity has overspread the globe, men longing after visible forms of God...we must hold it as a first principle, that as often as any form is assigned to God, his glory is corrupted by an impious lie.<sup>6</sup>

People prefer to fill their minds with fantasies, creating images from gold and silver, but the invisible God cannot be reduced to what is visible and the spirit cannot be portrayed with inanimate materials. Only idolatry will result, for 'the human mind is...a perpetual forge of idols.'<sup>7</sup>

It is true that Calvin did declare that 'sculpture and painting are gifts of God'<sup>8</sup> and that there is a lawful use of both. In particular, he stated, it is permissible to represent what can be seen in the world. But to give visible shape to God is unlawful because it will inevitably tarnish the image of God; nor did he accept the argument that images were useful as teaching aids for the simple and uneducated. Calvin goes on to conclude that churches should be free of any temptation, declaring

We know too well from experience that the moment images appear in churches, idolatry has as it were raised its banner... Even were the danger less imminent, still, when I consider the proper end for which churches were erected, it appears to me more unbecoming their sacredness than I well can tell, to admit any other images than those living symbols which the Lord has consecrated by his own word: I mean Baptism and the Lord's Supper.<sup>9</sup>

Zwingli held similarly austere and uncompromising views. In Zurich, a disputation in October 1523 soon resulted in a banning of all images from the churches and they became well known for the beauty of their austere plain white walls. The arguments Zwingli used mirrored those of Karlstadt, drawing on Scripture as his authority and declaring that worship and honour belong to God alone. For these reformers the Word, now freely available as a result of the revolution in printing techniques, was the source of a new kind of objective truth that images could only distort, and though the task of interpreting Scripture led to somewhat different responses, all sought a purified dependence on its authority as a guide for faith. The call was on each individual sinner to repent in faith and trust within their own souls, seeking the grace and renewal that would then show itself in the piety and godliness that is the fruit of such faith. Thus, 'The Calvinist emphasis that true decoration of the church consists in the moderation, piety, and virtues of

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<sup>6</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (2 vols.; trans. H. Beveridge, London: James Clarke and Co., 1949) I.XI.1.

<sup>7</sup> Calvin, I.XI.8.

<sup>8</sup> Calvin, I.XI.12.

<sup>9</sup> Calvin, I.XI.13.

reformed lives rather than costly materials had the effect of “moralizing beauty””.<sup>10</sup>

As we shall note in due course, it was Calvin in particular who influenced Baptist attitudes to art and images, but before doing so it is important to recognise that Luther adopted a rather different approach. He was certainly not of the same mind as Calvin and Zwingli when it came to determining what should be done about images and paintings in church.

## Luther and Cranach

Karlstadt's desire to bring about reform in Wittenberg quickly led him to denounce the presence of idols in the churches, and secure the agreement of the authorities to remove sixteen of the nineteen decorated altars and strip any images from the remaining three.<sup>11</sup> These actions, together with his abandonment of the Mass in favour of an evangelical celebration of the Lord's Supper, caused turmoil. Yet, 'From the moment of his return to Wittenberg on 6 March 1522, Luther worked to undo what the iconoclasts had accomplished.'<sup>12</sup> Part of his reasoning was no doubt political, for these kinds of actions were not universally welcomed and clearly presented a potential threat to social order. Violence and unrest could easily turn city rulers against reform, calling into question the success of the entire reforming movement, and so Luther argued for a much more careful approach that did not impose change but allowed it to happen consensually. As Lindberg notes, Karlstadt's determination to live out the new theology without compromise and Luther's desire to take a more gradual path 'raise the perennial questions of every reform movement.'<sup>13</sup>

It is a mistake, however, to suggest that Luther's resistance to iconoclasm was mere political expediency. In the sermons that he delivered on his arrival back in Wittenberg he was cautious, suggesting that 'we are free to have (images) or not, although it would be much better if we did not have them at all'.<sup>14</sup> He takes the key verses from Scripture used by the iconoclasts, arguing forcefully that while the worship of images is clearly forbidden, there is no suggestion that images themselves should be banned or destroyed. 'Here we must admit', he says, 'that we may have images and make images, but we must not worship them.'<sup>15</sup> Nothing will be served by

<sup>10</sup> Carter Lindberg, *The European Reformations*, p. 377.

<sup>11</sup> Steven Ozment, *The Serpent and the Lamb* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), p. 137.

<sup>12</sup> Joseph Koerner, *The Reformation of the Image*, p. 153.

<sup>13</sup> Carter Lindberg, *The European Reformations*, p. 109.

<sup>14</sup> Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut Lehmann (eds.) *Luther's Works* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959) Vol.51 p. 81.

<sup>15</sup> Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut Lehmann (eds.) *Luther's Works* Vol.51 p. 82.

breaking down altars and overthrowing images, for the Word must be allowed to do its work of enlightening the heart.

By 1525 Luther appears more sure of his ground in giving a place to images. In a treatise defending his position against Karlstadt, he emphasises that it is what is in the heart that matters, not what the eyes see, and having rehearsed once again the arguments from Scripture, including Exodus 20, he states:

Of this I am certain, that God desires to have his works heard and read, especially the passion of our Lord. But it is impossible for me to hear and bear it in mind without forming mental images of it in my heart. For whether I will or not, when I hear of Christ, an image of a man hanging on a cross takes form in my heart, just as the reflection of my face naturally appears in the water when I look into it. If it is not a sin but good to have the image of Christ in my heart, why should it be a sin to have it in my eyes? This is especially true since the heart is more important than the eyes.<sup>16</sup>

The truth is that images and pictures cannot be avoided. As Koerner suggests when discussing this passage, Luther's argument is that iconoclasm is inherently absurd, for even if manufactured crucifixes are destroyed, the image of the cross will form spontaneously in the heart.<sup>17</sup> Words make pictures, and having paintings within a church setting is to offer the community a natural way of communicating the faith that for some may be both appropriate and required.

A decisive influence upon Luther was his close relationship with the painter Lucas Cranach the Elder, and the out-workings of this relationship say as much about Luther's views as anything he wrote. Cranach made his name as a court painter in the early years of the sixteenth century, and established himself in Wittenberg where he achieved political prominence and opened a publishing house. The two men began to form a bond at the time when both were becoming known, one that would last for the remainder of their lives, and though Cranach was just as happy to accept commissions to paint from Catholics, it is suggested that 'his intervention on behalf of the Reformation was the linchpin of both men's success and historical reputation'.<sup>18</sup> In other words, Cranach's art and images were vital for the Reformation cause.

One of their first joint projects was Luther's translation of the New Testament into German. Known as the 'September Testament', Cranach organised its publication and also contributed twenty-one illustrations for the Book of Revelation. In time the entire translation of the Bible would also be

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<sup>16</sup> Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut Lehmann (eds) *Luther's Works* Vol.40 pp. 99-100.

<sup>17</sup> Joseph Koerner, *The Reformation of the Image*, pp. 160ff.

<sup>18</sup> Steven Ozment, *The Serpent and the Lamb*, p.147. Ozment offers a very full and full account of Luther and Cranach's developing partnership.

published by Cranach, complete with images of God. As an artist, Cranach understood better than Luther that images would become crucial in the propaganda war between the old order and the reformers. Well used, they could prove to be a potent force in promoting Protestant ideas, and one such Cranach painting was *The Law and the Gospel* produced in 1529, again in collaboration with Luther.<sup>19</sup> It has been described as one of the most influential Reformation images, and offers in visual form Luther's fundamental theological convictions: on one side is 'the law' that leads to judgment and death (Christ sits in judgment on Adam and Eve, and Moses gestures towards the Ten Commandments); on the other side is 'gospel' that results in resurrection and eternal life (a naked man, dispossessed of anything that he himself might offer, is directed to Christ on the cross who alone is sufficient to redeem him). The tree that divides the painting is dead on the left with its images of law, and alive on the right where the gospel reigns.

During the course of their rich association, Cranach produced portrait paintings of Luther himself, again, as part of the attempt to promote and secure political support for reform. An image of a humble spiritual leader, who was seeking to live a holy and obedient life, was far more likely to win support than the image of someone strong, angry and determined who looked likely to cause unrest. And Cranach duly obliged, abandoning initial portrait attempts until the desired effect was achieved.<sup>20</sup>

### ***The Wittenberg Altarpiece (1547)***

Even though it was not finally completed and installed until the year after Luther's death, the *Wittenberg Altarpiece* offered the most significant memorial to the partnership between Luther and Cranach and their Reformation ideas. It certainly has a functional purpose, designed to offer teaching in the key principles of the protestant faith to all who gazed at it, but at the same time its paintings have a beauty and intricacy that inspires worship and devotion. It remains in place in the City Church in Wittenberg today, dominating the sanctuary and testifying to the inherent power of images and art.<sup>21</sup>

There are three upper panels to the altarpiece and these show the sacraments recognised by Luther: to the left, baptism; to the right, confession; in the centre, communion. But these are not images that simply

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<sup>19</sup> There are various versions available to view, including: <[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Cranach\\_Gesetz\\_und\\_Gnade\\_Gotha.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Cranach_Gesetz_und_Gnade_Gotha.jpg)>

<sup>20</sup> Steven Ozment, *The Serpent and the Lamb*, pp. 126ff.

<sup>21</sup> There are many reproductions available to see online, including: <<http://www.medievalhistories.com/ways-cranach/>>

point back to biblical texts, for they celebrate and affirm the contemporary work of the church and those who are involved in its life and ministry. Past and present are deliberately confused. In the large central panel members of the Wittenberg congregation sit with the Apostles and Christ to share the Last Supper, including Luther himself who is shown being handed the Cup – for it was Luther who had restored the Cup to the congregation. It is important to note that the table is round, leaving no opportunity for priestly hierarchy, and the large arched openings at the back link the sharing of the meal with the wider world. This is no secret rite fenced off from ordinary people.

Familiar faces can also be seen in the portrayal of baptism. Cranach himself appears as the godfather with Philip Melancthon, another of the leading reforming theologians, the one performing the baptism; a number of women from the city are painted watching the ceremony. It is noteworthy that the pool is big enough to take an adult. On the other side, open confessions are being heard – one of the outward marks of the church listed by Luther – and the local pastor, Johannes Bugenhagen, is shown offering pardon to one man by holding the key of heaven over his head and at the same time refusing it to an evidently wealthy individual whose hands remain tied.

The bottom predella is particularly interesting. At its centre is a thin, emaciated Christ on the cross spanning empty space between, on the one side, Luther preaching from the pulpit, and on the other, an attentive congregation listening to his words. The preaching of the Word is central to the activity of the church, but that preaching must always be about Christ, to whom Luther points and directs attention. The congregation includes members of Luther's family, including his wife and son, in a direct affirmation of the importance of family life as a right and proper context for living out the gospel, in contrast to the old order's emphasis on the value of celibacy.

Thus, for all sorts of reasons, this is very clearly a Protestant altarpiece. Yet it is more complicated than that. In his careful analysis of the predella, Koerner begins by noting that its physical position, together with its portrayal of the crucifixion, would have made Catholics feel quite at home.<sup>22</sup> Its location bars the priest from standing behind the altar and facing the congregation, as Luther had recommended, and refutes the actions of the iconoclasts by returning an image to the very place that they had sought to cleanse. However, the empty space around the crucifix reminds the viewer that cleansing has indeed taken place (there are no relics, ornaments and

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<sup>22</sup> Joseph Koerner, *The Reformation of the Image*, ch. 11.

objects as would have appeared in the past) and Christ's presence is found in the preaching of the Word.

Further, Koerner goes on to note that the image of Christ on the cross is ambiguous. Is he present or not? In one sense he clearly is, for the artist has deliberately placed Christ in that central position. Luther in the pulpit points towards him, and we as observers are invited to make him the focus of our attention. But equally he appears less than present, with the cross insecurely standing on a stone floor, Christ's blood flowing down beneath his feet but not onto the floor, and the congregation looking towards Luther rather than the crucifix. Cranach indicates that 'this picture exists elsewhere, that it must be somehow a crucifix "in the heart"'.<sup>23</sup>

The *Wittenberg Altarpiece* says much about Luther's approach to images and art. Koerner's detailed study explores this in considerable depth, for he draws attention to criticisms of such Reformation art for its polemical nature, noting the argument that it does nothing more than hold up a mirror to the church in order to offer appropriate teaching and instruction in what it meant to be a reformed community.<sup>24</sup> Limiting the role of art in this way, of course, helps avoid any possible charge of idolatry and protects the priority of the Word. But one of the gifts of art is that, whatever the expressed intention, it opens up space for engagement that cannot so easily be controlled – not least an engagement that draws into dialogue our interior and exterior worlds.

Luther raised his voice – as did both Calvin and Zwingli – against empty Catholic practices that lacked authenticity, rejecting a reliance on actions, objects or images that bore no relation to inner faith. The grace and forgiveness that flows from the cross of Christ had to be experienced within the heart. Yet Luther also wanted to resist the path followed by the other reformers in their refusal to give recognition to anything except this inner life of faith that they saw as derived from the truth of God's Word accepted and believed within the heart. He wanted to affirm that grace has external signs, that the spirit makes use of material means, and that images communicate in silence the message of the unspeakable Word that is Christ crucified.

## Baptists and Images

Reformation movements spread throughout Europe and assumed a different character in different places. The Reformers each exercised influence, and

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<sup>23</sup> Joseph Koerner, *The Reformation of the Image*, p. 177.

<sup>24</sup> Joseph Koerner, *The Reformation of the Image*, ch. 2.

their influence was often determined by social and political as well as religious factors. In England, the initial influence was Lutheran, and though Henry VIII notoriously moved to confiscate and destroy art objects following his break from Rome, and many church statues were lost and church paintings whitewashed, there is evidence that the early years of the Reformation were not as devoid of visual culture as might be thought. Woodcuts were frequently to be found in printed books, and 'Luther's catechism appeared adorned with prints illustrating many of the commandments and doctrines – even with images of God and the trinity.'<sup>25</sup> Indeed, two major literary works of the period, the Coverdale Bible produced in 1535 and Foxe's *Book of Martyrs* from 1563, are both famous for their images, used to help reinforce the messages communicated through the written word.

But in the years immediately preceding Baptist beginnings, it was the influence of Calvinism rather than Lutheranism that was gaining the upper hand, and it is suggested by Collinson that 'from the 1580s Protestants began to direct the eye, that potentially idolatrous eye, inward, rejecting realistic religious pictures as unreservedly as bible plays and godly ballads'.<sup>26</sup> The initial use of images had been utilitarian, representing no solid tradition, for it was the hearing and preaching of the Word, finding a place in the human heart through the activity of God's Spirit, that was of highest importance. And as Puritanism developed in strength, inspired by the example of Geneva and the teachings of Calvin, a more systematic rejection of images emerged as part of this calling to 'purify' the church of anything that could not be justified from Scripture.

The very stark view that at the hands of the Puritans, Protestant English culture proceeded to lose all sense of the visual is challenged, interestingly with the help of the argument Luther himself made: that it is, in reality, impossible to stop the mind creating inner pictures. Moore argues that 'turning the verbal images of Scripture into mental pictures was a crucial element in Reformed strategy to win people over to a new religious culture'<sup>27</sup> and that the idea that words and books replaced images is too simplistic. But while that argument certainly has force, we nevertheless have to reckon with the fact that text had come to dominate Puritan worship, and whatever images the imagination was – or was not – allowed to conjure up, the fear of idolatry ruled that painted pictures should be banished from church buildings.

It is worth noting that this did not mean a complete abandonment of art. Rather, as British artists chose to leave behind the religious images that

<sup>25</sup> William Dyrness, *Reformed Theology and Visual Culture*, (Cambridge: CUP, 2004) p. 95.

<sup>26</sup> Patrick Collinson, *The Birthpangs of Protestant England* (London: Macmillan, 1988) p. 117.

<sup>27</sup> Susan Hardman Moore, 'Calvinism and the Arts', *Theology in Scotland*, XVI, no.2 (2009) p.85.



had previously earned them a living, they turned instead to landscapes and portraiture, which in itself reflected Calvinist ideas both of creation as the place where we see God's glory and our neighbour as the place where we see God's image. Hans Holbein is one example of a prominent British portrait painter who sought to capture a sense of the fundamental humanity of the person being painted.<sup>28</sup> In the Netherlands, the influence of Calvinism is seen particularly in the art of Pieter Jansz Saenredam who, having been brought up a strict Calvinist, painted beautiful church interiors showing their plain whitewashed walls.<sup>29</sup>

As Helwys and Smyth made their journey into exile in Amsterdam in the early 1600s, and Helwys returned soon afterwards to form the first Baptist church on English soil, they did so from within this culture. And the general, though not universal, iconoclastic approach to images in church would continue to gain ground up until the Civil War. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that Baptists were shaped and formed by such Puritan attitudes, and their dissenting commitments put them in opposition to an Anglicanism they regarded as just as in need of reform as Catholicism.

It is fair to say that, for social and economic reasons, Baptists have often had little scope to consider or embrace the visual arts. Their church communities and buildings have frequently lacked the status and wealth needed to explore the possibility of images. Yet the theological and scriptural arguments against the use of pictures and imagery have always been a powerful influence, even when an alternative approach might have proved possible. Baptist churches and chapels in Britain – and no doubt elsewhere – have tended to be plain and functional, designed as auditoriums where the Word can most easily be heard, and for their congregations the presence of paintings, stained glass or statues would have been regarded as unthinkable. The expectation was that walls were to be kept unadorned, and that the pulpit would have centre stage. The path to salvation came through faith in the Word; Bible and sermon were to be central in the liturgy; hearing was elevated above seeing. Over the years, the only art to appear has tended to be perhaps rather grim portraits of past Ministers and the decoration of significant texts from Scripture.

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<sup>28</sup> Examples of his work are widely available, including here:

<<https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/artists/hans-holbein-the-younger>>

<sup>29</sup> Examples of his work are widely available, including here:

<<https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/rijksstudio/artists/pieter-jansz-saenredam>>

## Learning to see again

The Reformation is widely regarded as having been a disaster for the arts, and particularly for the presence of images in places of worship. But as we have seen, the story is more nuanced than that. While Baptists may well trace many of their most influential theological convictions back to Calvin, it is evident that the man who inspired the Reformation saw things rather differently. Luther may have spoken somewhat ambivalently about images in church, but his close and fruitful partnership with Cranach resulted in the development of Protestant art that had profound significance. He recognised why images might matter, and it is important that we do so as well.

Truth is discerned at many different levels and it is communicated in many different ways. It is multi-faceted, and the knowledge that leads to truth is experienced and discovered through all kinds of processes. In particular, words alone – including the words of Scripture – will not always provide us with everything we seek, for truth is also found in embodiment and relationship, and is encountered in absence as well as presence. And this will mean that even when we do use words, it will be to recognise the power and importance of their metaphorical and symbolic potential.

In all of this, art can assist us. Art is embodied; it is made of wood, canvas and paint; it is a ‘thing’ existing in the world. Yet it is not just a material object as is illustrated, paradoxically, by those who were so fearful of images. Why were they so afraid of idolatry? Because art such as that seen in the *Wittenberg Altarpiece* offers a way by which heart, body and imagination are all opened up to explore truth. Christ is encountered within the human heart and yet is also visible and seen by the human eye, and so inspires love and devotion. The idea that wood and paint was being worshipped was often refuted, and certainly Luther did not believe it. But for those who feared the falsity of anything that could not be fixed, defined and held by words, there was no alternative but to condemn.

Art is greater than any attempt to translate it into words. It certainly should be. It invites us to work with symbol and metaphor. It recognises that analytical explanations will only take us so far, for the God whom we worship as we look at the image of the cross makes no sense. The cross hides God as much as reveals God; the painted crucifix dispels God’s presence in the world and yet must be seen inwardly with the eyes of faith. But sadly, ‘Because of the inability to accept the ambiguous or metaphorical, and because of a fear of the power of the imagination, images were objects of terror.’<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Iain McGilchrist, *The Master and his Emissar*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009) p. 316.

As Baptists, we need to give attention to the visual. If our faith is to express authentic wholeness, bringing together outer and inner dimensions, taking seriously an incarnational faith that demands room for metaphor, then that means having a place for the visual as well as the Word. Luther recognised that more clearly than Calvin.

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# **‘An Intolerable Usurpation’:<sup>1</sup>**

## **Theology and Practice of Ministry among Early Particular Baptists<sup>2</sup>**

Ian Birch

This article investigates the theology and practice of ministry in English Particular Baptist communities in the formative phase of their development from 1640-1660. Consideration is given to the historical context of Baptist developments and how their innovations were viewed by opponents within the Established Church. Theological and practical innovations in ministry made possible by the Reformation, especially the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers, are examined and parallel lines of biblical interpretation are discussed. Particular Baptist ministry gave opportunities for ministry to lay members of the church, emphasising the gift of the Spirit, rather than university education, as the essential requirement for effective service.

### **Key Words**

Ministry, Preaching, Christology, Calling

### **Introduction**

The phrase ‘An Intolerable Usurpation’ is taken from an early critic of English Baptists in reference to the practice of allowing lay members of their churches to preach and perform tasks of ministry, which traditionally was the preserve of trained and episcopally ordained men who guarded the pulpit as their domain by divine right. This paper is a historical and theological consideration of the distinctive pattern of ministry which emerged among the first English Baptists in the middle of the seventeenth century, a time when the ‘world was being turned upside down’ and Baptists believed they were called by God to re-establish the true church, free from corruptions, in their own land.

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<sup>1</sup> Josiah Ricraft, *A Looking Glasse for the Anabaptists and the Rest of the Separatists* (London, 1645), p. 11.

<sup>2</sup> This article is part of a larger examination into early Baptist views of ministry in a forthcoming book, *The Ecclesial Polity of the English Particular Baptists, 1640-1660*, published by Wipf & Stock.

## Historical Context

English Particular Baptists emerged as a distinct association of churches during the early 1640s, the age of the English Civil wars. In this decade they witnessed the exclusion of the Bishops from Parliament (15 February 1641/2), abolition of episcopacy in the Church of England (officially in October 1646), and the attempt to construct a new form of ministry for the National Church, based on Scottish Presbyterianism, and it was possibly the most complex and chaotic period in English ecclesiastical history. Against this background, emerging Calvinistic Baptists attempted to construct their own version of the true church, with orderly ministry, fashioned according to the New Testament church, together with a Christological conviction of total allegiance to King Jesus as the only rightful sovereign over the church.

Particular Baptists can trace their ecclesiastical roots to the semi-separatist congregation founded by Independent Puritan Henry Jacob in Southwark, in 1616. Although Jacob had intended that the gathered church he founded should have 'professional' ministry,<sup>3</sup> that is, university-educated and ordained men, his ecclesiology made possible a contrary development resulting in lay members of the church 'exercising' before the congregation. So, when separatist 'Baptist' churches began to proliferate after 1638, it was not considered extraordinary within their own constituency that the majority of leaders were laymen, usually tradesmen, not dependent on the congregation for their living. The custom of lay preaching which had been incipient in the 1616 congregation, by the beginning of the revolution flowered into a fully elaborated lay pastorate.<sup>4</sup>

Since most Baptist congregations in the early 1640s were small in number, and resources were meagre, a professional ministry in their churches was in most instances an unaffordable luxury. One of their most bitter opponents, Daniel Featley, ridiculed the social standing of Baptist preachers and petitioned Parliament to silence them on the basis that: '[In their meetings] a brewers Clerk exerciseth, A Taylor expoundeth, A Waterman Teacheth – the lowest of the people.'<sup>5</sup>

Thomas Edwards, another prominent critic of Baptists, tried to arouse the fear and loathing of the nation towards Baptists by writing in his famous polemical work *Gangraena*: 'Is it fitting that well meaning Christians should

<sup>3</sup> Henry Jacob, *A Confession and Protestation of the Faith of Certain Christians* (London, 1616), B9, B4, C7. The first three ministers of this congregation, Jacob, Lathorp and Jessey, were university-educated and ordained clergymen.

<sup>4</sup> See Murray Tolmie, *The Triumph of the Saints: The Separate Churches of London 1616-1649* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), p. 42. The growth of the 'lay tradition' in Puritanism is discussed at some length in Claire Cross, *Church and People: England 1450-1660*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999) especially, for the Revolutionary period, chapter 9. Also, James F. MacLear, 'The Making of the Lay Tradition', *The Journal of Religion* 33.2 (1953), 113-136.

<sup>5</sup> Featley, *The Dippers dipt.*, B4 Preface. See also *The Clergyes Bill of Complaint* (Oxford, 1643), p. 5.

be [permitted] to go and make Churches, and then proceed to choose whom they will for Ministers.[?]'<sup>6</sup>

In a series of correspondences with prominent Baptist leader and successful merchant William Kiffin, Josiah Ricraft wrote to warn Kiffin,

That you are so far from having any warrant to be a Minister of any such congregation, as that you have not the least warrant to be a Minister of any at all. But your taking upon you to be a Minister to dispense the Word and Sacraments, is a greater sin and disorder than ever any was in the constitution of the Church of England since Reformation. And for ignorant illiterate men, the lowest of the people such as yourself, to take upon you to be a Minister of God, a guide of souls, is such an intolerable usurpation & profanation of God's name, that without great repentance you will find one day to your cost that fulfilled of the Saviour, The blind lead the blind, and both fall into the ditch.<sup>7</sup>

A legal prohibition on lay preaching was issued on 26 April 1645, and a petition was submitted to Parliament against lay preachers by the Lord Mayor and Common Council of London on 19 December 1646. Baptists were undeterred by Parliament's ordinances and continued to refine their theology and practice of encouraging those deemed gifted and called to officiate in the offices of Christ.

## Baptist Theology of Lay Ministry

The necessity of social class was not the only cause of Baptists promoting lay ministry in their churches; their practice was theologically motivated. In their first public *Apologia*, the London Confession of 1644, they stated the conviction that in their gathered churches ministry was not the preserve of the privileged few but the responsibility of every believer.<sup>8</sup> This was re-emphasised in article XLV which clarified that, far from being a free-for-all, ministry was rooted in the gift of God to his people, to be discerned within and delegated by the congregation, for the good of the congregation:

That also such to whom God hath given gifts, being tried in the Church, may and ought by the appointment of the Congregation, to prophesy, according to the proportion of faith, and so teach publicly the Word of God, for the edification, exhortation, and comfort of the Church.<sup>9</sup>

General Baptist Edmund Chillenden went even further than 'ought', and promoted a 'doctrine of obligation' which required every baptised believer

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<sup>6</sup> Thomas Edwards, *Reasons Against the Independent Government of the Particular Congregations* (London, 1641), p. 23. Here and throughout the paper, spelling has been modernised for ease of the wider readership.

<sup>7</sup> Josiah Ricraft, *A Looking Glasse for the Anabaptists*, p. 11.

<sup>8</sup> They stated, 'ought all men to come . . . to be enrolled amongst [Christ's] household servants . . . to present their bodies and souls, and to bring their gifts God hath given them'. First London Confession articles XXXIV and XXXV, in Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions*, p. 166.

<sup>9</sup> In Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions*, 168.

to employ their spiritual gifts and graces for the edification of the body: 'God requires it of them and they may not neglect it', he wrote.<sup>10</sup> Ministry was not the preserve of university-educated, state-validated men, but belonged to all the saints, so how was such a ministry to be organised and authenticated?

## Baptist Theology of Calling to Ministry

Baptist opponents, as seen above, focused much of their criticism of Baptist churches on the observation that their ministry lacked traditional authorisation or divine institution, since it operated independent of apostolic succession. This probably accounts for a return to the question of the 'call' to ministry in another article of the London Confession, XXXVI, which addresses these issues at core:

every Church has power given them from Christ for their better well-being, to choose to themselves meet persons into the office of Pastors, Teachers, Elders, Deacons, being qualified according to the Word, as those which Christ has appointed in his Testament, for the feeding, governing, serving, and building up of his Church, and that none other have power to impose them, either these or any other.<sup>11</sup>

In this statement it is evident that Baptist theology and practice of ministry was, in the first place, Christologically oriented and rooted in a conviction of divine institution. Contrary to the idea that the minister or priest was divinely instituted *directly*, however, the congregation is the locus of ministerial legitimacy. The church has 'power from Christ to choose meet people for offices of ministry,' thus the *ecclesia* has a delegated authority which takes priority over ministry, both in time and rank. First came the church and ministry arose to serve the needs of the church, thus the church exists before and has authority over ministry. For some scholars, the Puritan tendency toward subordination of the ministry to the congregation<sup>12</sup> was now, among Baptists, accelerated to a more radical dismantling of the 'professional barrier which even in Congregationalism had stood between clergy and lay'.<sup>13</sup> It was not the case that the Baptists confused or denied the distinctions between clergy and laity, they simply did not believe these categories were from Christ and hence had no validity in a rightly constituted church.

<sup>10</sup> Edmund Chillenden, *Preaching without Ordination* (London: George Whittington, 1647), p. 24.

<sup>11</sup> Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions*, 166.

<sup>12</sup> Evident, for example, in the first General Baptist minister John Smyth. See W.T. Whitley, *The Works of John Smyth*, ii.393. For analysis of Smyth's view see David Hall who judges that among the separatists it was Smyth who 'most radically subordinated the office of the ministry to the gathered church'. David Hall, *The Faithful Shepherd: A History of the New England Ministry in the Seventeenth Century* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1972), p. 38.

<sup>13</sup> James F. MacLear, 'The Making of the Lay Tradition', p. 125.

Did this policy mean that Particular Baptists were anti-clerical in their understanding of ministry?<sup>14</sup> When we consider that Baptist church officers were often chosen from among the congregation, appointed by congregational election, and sustained financially by the gifts of the congregation,<sup>15</sup> these factors might suggest absolute anti-clericalism. On the other hand, if early Baptist ministry is considered from the perspective of the service performed, rather than in terms of status, there is evidence of great appreciation of ministers, and a longing in many churches to have a separated ministry. In the church at Kilmington, for example, the congregation was well served in its early years by approved elders who exercised their teaching gifts, yet the first recorded decision by the church, dated 14<sup>th</sup> of the 12mo. 1653, was a letter to an Oxfordshire minister John Pendarves inviting him to join them as pastor at Kilmington.<sup>16</sup> Pendarves, who was minister at Abingdon at the time, declined the invitation to move to Kilmington, and three years later was dead. The Kilmington record demonstrates, however, the yearning to supplement the gifts of its elders with those of a recognised pastor, though the precise reasons for this are not recorded.<sup>17</sup> It suggests that Baptist attitudes towards ministers were more nuanced than the language of anti-clericalism allows, and while professional ministers might be regarded as unnecessary, or even undesirable, by many congregations, a separated ministry was by no means universally rejected.

If we ask about the theological foundations for lay ministry among early Baptists, four factors seem to have been of most importance. First, the availability of the Bible and the belief in its intelligibility and perspicuity, a 'Puritan scripturism', which had 'stimulat[ed] a self-reliant religiousness.'<sup>18</sup> The legitimisation of lay preaching was based on the conviction that with the Bible in hand, each believer had access to the final authority on all matters of faith and life. 'Here [in scripture] the divine will was revealed to the simplest believer in independence of all priestly or churchly mediation.' Any saint, possessed of the Spirit, and possessing a Bible, might bring a message from God to the congregation as seen in article XLV of the 1644 Confession:

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<sup>14</sup> Popular views about the clergy among Independents can be gauged by a comment by Cromwell in respect of the Irish Church. He said 'So Antichristian and dividing a term as clergy and laity were unknown in the primitive church. It was your pride that begat this expression, and it is for filthy lucre's sake that you keep it up, that by making the people believe they are not so holy as yourselves, they might for their penny purchase some sanctity from you; and that you might bridle, saddle and ride them at your pleasure.' Cited in Christopher Hill, *God's Englishman: Oliver Cromwell and the English Revolution* (London: Penguin Books, 2000=1971), p. 122. See also James F. MacLear, 'Popular Anticlericalism in the Puritan Revolution', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 17.4 (1956), 443-470.

<sup>15</sup> The numbers of fully qualified clergymen amongst the ranks of the Particular Baptists were few. Hanserd Knollys, Benjamin Cox, Henry Jessey, and John Tombs were prominent ex-clergymen.

<sup>16</sup> J.B. Whitely (ed.), *From Backwoods to Beacon: Kilmington Baptist Church: the first 350 Years* (2000), p. 11.

<sup>17</sup> George Allome was elected the first pastor of the church on 10 May 1669. J.B. Whitely (ed.), *From Backwoods to Beacon*, p. 11.

<sup>18</sup> James F. MacLear, 'The Making of the Lay Tradition', p. 115.



To whom God hath given gifts, being tried in the Church, may and ought by the appointment of the Congregation . . . [to] teach publicly the Word of God, for the edification, exhortation, and comfort of the Church.<sup>19</sup>

Second, the immediacy of the Holy Spirit to each believer fully and completely meant that any member of the congregation could be the means of spiritual encounter between God and his people. In his stout defence of lay preaching and prophesying, Samuel How spoke for many separatists, including Baptists, when he prioritised the enabling of the Spirit:

*The Spirit searches the deep things of God, and the spiritual man discerns all things; if then the Spirit searcheth the deep things of God, and that discerns all things, what need we more: and with this agrees the Apostle John, saying, And ye need not that any man teach you, save as the Anointing teacheth you. Then I conclude, That we need not that any man teach us, not the Master, nor any of his followers, for the Disciples of Jesus Christ do learn (as the truth is) in him, and of him, and they have received the Spirit of God, that they might know the things of God; therefore we may well be without any man's learning, and have no need of it; and so the point is clear and plain, That such as are taught by Gods Spirit without that Learning, do truly understand the Word.*<sup>20</sup>

Ministry which relied on worldly education is here set in opposition to ministry reliant on the Spirit,<sup>21</sup> and Baptist leader Samuel How argued that it was no longer necessary to study theology, learn languages, and understand the rudiments of hermeneutics in order to minister the Word of God to the people. The 'gift' of reading, explaining, and applying the scriptures, recognised and approved by the congregation was sufficient.<sup>22</sup> While this was something of an ideological statement, 'the uneducated man's and woman's way of rejecting the hegemony of the learned élite',<sup>23</sup> How's argument was also the justification of the necessary, since amongst Baptists a preaching ministry that depended more upon the zeal and fervour of the preacher, than erudition and scholarship, was indeed what most had to

<sup>19</sup> In Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions*, 168.

<sup>20</sup> Samuel How, *The Sufficiencie of the Spirits Teaching*, C1. Italics as original.

<sup>21</sup> Oliver Cromwell reflected the attitude of many sectaries towards university-educated clergy when he said, in 1657, 'what pitiful certificates served to make a man a Minister! If any man could understand Latin and Greek, he was sure to be admitted.' W.C. Abbot (ed.), *The Writings and Speeches of Oliver Cromwell*, 4 vols. (Cambridge, MA, and London: Clarendon Press, 1937-47), vol.4, pp. 495-6; compare also p. 272. This is one cause of Richard Baxter's antipathy towards sectaries. 'Education', he wrote, 'is God's ordinary way for the Conveyance of his Grace, and ought no more to be set in opposition to the Spirit, than the preaching of the Word.' Cited in Geoffrey Nuttall, *The Holy Spirit in Puritan Faith and Experience*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992=1947), p.84. Thomas Goodwin also took the contrary view to that of How: 'There is a generation of men that are against acquired knowledge, or that which is sought out by study, or received from others, and would have all infused.' Thomas Goodwin, Works XI, 377.

<sup>22</sup> Lucy Hutchinson, *Memoirs of the Life of Colonel Hutchinson* (London: Keegan Paul, Trench, 1904), pp. 289ff.

<sup>23</sup> Barry Reay, 'Quakerism and Society', in J.F. McGregor & B. Reay (eds.), *Radical Religion in the English Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), p. 146.

offer.<sup>24</sup> This was not lost on opponents such as Scots commissioner Robert Baillie, who pointed out to Parliament,

In their Pastors they required no secular learning, yea to them all secular learning was abominable, they did burn all books but the Bible as impediments and hurtful instruments to the Ministry of the Gospel.

They required their illiterate Pastors to work with their own hands for their livings.<sup>25</sup>

This accusation was no embarrassment to Baptist preachers, who believed that even as God worked secretly in the soul of sinners to effect in them salvation by unmediated grace, so he might reveal his thoughts to those who waited upon him, again by his grace. William Kiffin testified to this type of experience. Having found faith and soul-rest in Christ through the preaching of John Goodwin, he began to meet with other young men to ‘read some portion of Scripture, and [speak] from it what it pleased God to enable us’.<sup>26</sup> This has been characterised by James MacLear as a ‘spirit of religious self-reliance’.<sup>27</sup> Prophets, so moved by the Holy Spirit in the heart, following the preaching of the word, were prompted to offer a mixture of biblical exegesis, personal testimony, and exhortation for the benefit of the gathered company.<sup>28</sup>

A third explanation for the rise of lay ministry was the erosion of the culture of deference which coincided with the Civil War.<sup>29</sup> For the generation of Englishmen willing to execute the monarch with the blade of an axe, it was a smaller step to deprecate the ministry of clergymen.<sup>30</sup> Baptist theology of ministry both participated in and contributed to the Puritan movement towards democracy, and a levelling of the social classes. In terms of social egalitarianism Baptists did not go nearly so far as Quakers who refused to show deference to anyone,<sup>31</sup> but a believer, called by Christ and empowered by the Spirit, though lowly in world status, might easily become prominent in the ministry of Christ’s kingdom on earth.

A fourth factor contributing to the rise of lay ministry was the Reformed doctrine of the universal priesthood of believers.<sup>32</sup> The 1644

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<sup>24</sup> This is not to say that most ministers did not work hard to improve their knowledge. William Kiffin describes his labours in self-study of the Bible. William Orme, *Remarkable Passages in the Life of William Kiffin* (London: Burton and Smith, 1823), p. 22.

<sup>25</sup> Robert Baillie, ‘Anabaptism the true fountaine of . . . Errors’, p. 31.

<sup>26</sup> See William Orme, *Remarkable Passages in the Life of William Kiffin*, pp. 7-12.

<sup>27</sup> James F. MacLear, ‘The Making of the Lay Tradition’, p.116.

<sup>28</sup> Geoffrey Nuttall, *The Holy Spirit in Puritan Faith and Experience*, p. 75.

<sup>29</sup> This is highlighted by H.N. Brailsford, *The Levellers and the English Revolution* (Nottingham: Spokesman, 1983), p. 34 and passim.

<sup>30</sup> See Samuel How, *The Sufficiencie of the Spirits Teaching*, p. 21.

<sup>31</sup> Barry Reay, ‘Quakerism and Society’, p. 162.

<sup>32</sup> Here I trace the Lutheran, rather than Calvin’s interpretation of this doctrine. See Paul Avis, *The Church in the Theology of the Reformers* (London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1981), pp. 95-6.

London Confession, article XVII, stated that Christ in his Priesthood 'makes his people a holy Priesthood', proof texted with 1 Peter 2.5.<sup>33</sup> Here we have a connection between early Baptist views of ministry and the impact of the Reformation, since the theology of the common priesthood takes us back to Luther.<sup>34</sup> This is not to claim that a causal link can be established between Luther and Baptist practice, but only that the Baptist theology of ministry conforms to the pattern of the communal priesthood in Luther.

## Luther's Doctrine of the Universal Priesthood

As a consequence of his new understanding of faith and grace, Luther came to see that there is only one Christian estate common to all baptised believers, *des Christlichen Standes*, which encompassed all Christians, both 'clergy' and 'laity', equally and alike:<sup>35</sup>

All Christians are truly of the spiritual estate and there is no difference among them except that of office . . . because we all have one baptism, one gospel, one faith, and are all Christians alike; for baptism, gospel, and faith alone make us spiritual and a Christian people . . . we are all consecrated priests through baptism, as St Peter says in 1 Peter 2, 'You are a royal priesthood and a priestly realm,' and The Apocalypse says, 'Thou hast made us to be priests and kings by thy blood.'<sup>36</sup>

Luther's statement affirmed the absolute equality of all Christians who by grace through faith share a common dignity and common calling in the Christian life. Rejecting totally the Roman view of the sacrament of ordination and priesthood, he argued that we are all priests because 'priest' means 'a Christian or spiritual human being.'<sup>37</sup> In 'The Babylonian Captivity' he writes,

we are all equally priests, as many of us as are baptized, and by this way we truly are; . . . we are all priests, as many of us as are Christians.<sup>38</sup>

In his study of Luther's theology of ministry, Norman Nagel suggests that Luther was not primarily seeking to address an ecclesiological problem, the concentration of ministry in a select order to the exclusion of others, but a Christological aberration, since he had come to realise that Christ had been

<sup>33</sup> Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions*, 161.

<sup>34</sup> Luther did not use the term 'Priesthood of All Believers', but rather the concept of 'allgemeine Priestertum', literally 'universal or common priesthood'. See Timothy Wengert, 'The Priesthood of All Believers and Other Pious Myths' at <[http://scholar.valpo.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1118&context=ils\\_papers](http://scholar.valpo.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1118&context=ils_papers)> (accessed 29 October 2016). Also, Norman Nagel, 'Luther and the Priesthood of All Believers', in *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 61.4 (October 1997), 277-298.

<sup>35</sup> Luther, 'An Open Letter to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation' (1520), in *Luther's Works* 44, 127.

<sup>36</sup> *Luther's Works* 44, 127. See also, 'The Babylonian Captivity of the Church', in *Luther's Works* 36, 112-113.

<sup>37</sup> *Luther's Works* 44, 127, 129. See also *Luther's Works* 36, 140. See also Brian Gerrish 'Priesthood and Ministry in the Theology of Luther', *Church History* (October 1964), 404-422.

<sup>38</sup> *Luther's Works* 36, 112-13.

displaced from his rightful place in the Church.<sup>39</sup> In speaking about priesthood, Luther asserts that in the New Testament ‘priest’ only applies to Christ,<sup>40</sup> and then by extension to all believers in Christ communally,<sup>41</sup> and having established that the essence and origin of priesthood is in Christ, Luther expounds the nature of secondary priesthood from 1 Peter 2.

As a correction to the pietistic and individual understanding of Luther at this point, it should be noted that Luther’s interpretation of this text was in terms not of a ‘priesthood of all believers’ but a common priesthood given ‘to all Christians communally’.<sup>42</sup> In other words, the functions of ministry do not belong to the individual who performs them; they are the common property of all Christians.<sup>43</sup> In Luther, the Priesthood of All Believers does not focus on the individual, the privilege and responsibility of each church member. The ‘royal priesthood’, the ‘holy priesthood’, is a communal gift with a strong congregational emphasis.<sup>44</sup> It is not that the church *has* a priesthood, rather the church *is* a priesthood.

Luther did not suggest that there should be no ministers in the church, or that anyone in the church had the right to preach, baptise, and administer the sacraments. While it is true that we are all priests, he argues, we are not all vicars.<sup>45</sup> In ‘The Babylonian Captivity’ he argued that, although we are all priests by virtue of our baptism, some are authorised to exercise the pastoral office.<sup>46</sup> That authorisation, however, comes via the community’s permission and entrustment, a principle that Baptists were also keen to preserve.

In his ‘Letter to the German Nobility’, Luther imagined a scenario in which there is no bishop, no ordained minister, and ministry must of necessity be instituted by the congregation, which it has every right to do by virtue of its possession of the Gospel and its spiritual priesthood:

if a little company of pious Christian laymen were taken prisoners and carried away to a desert, and had not among them a priest consecrated by a bishop, and were there to agree to elect one of them, born in wedlock or not, and were to order him to baptize, to celebrate the mass, to absolve, and to preach, this man would as truly be a priest, as if all the bishops and all the Popes had consecrated him.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Norman Nagel, ‘Luther and the Priesthood of All Believers’, p. 281.

<sup>40</sup> The same approach is evident among Particular Baptists, who state in the First London Confession, ‘To be Prophet, Priest, and King of the Church of God, is so proper to Christ, as neither in the whole, nor in any part thereof, it can be transferred from him to any other.’

<sup>41</sup> *Luther’s Works* 36, 138-139.

<sup>42</sup> Timothy Wengert, ‘The Priesthood of All Believers’, p. 25.

<sup>43</sup> *Luther’s Works* 36, 141.

<sup>44</sup> *Luther’s Works* 39, 312-313.

<sup>45</sup> See Cyril Eastwood, *The Priesthood of All Believers* (Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2009), p. 44.

<sup>46</sup> *Luther’s Works* 36, 112.

<sup>47</sup> *Luther’s Works* 44, 128; c.f. *Luther’s Works* 39, 310.

On first appearance, this famous Lutheran parable looks like an instance of 'delegation theory' of ministry, whereby to be a minister is to hold an office, to be *trusted* with a function according to a necessary human arrangement. It is a total rejection of ministry in terms of a *character indelebilis* as was the norm in a Roman Catholic perspective. In the wider context of Luther's theology, however, this understanding of ministry is the glory of the Gospel and the outworking of what it means to have all things *in* Christ and *from* Christ. But this flags up a tension in Luther's theology of ministry, which on the one hand is a matter of delegation by the congregation, but on the other hand is instituted by Christ. According to the former conviction, a minister is only a functionary, and if he should be deprived of his office he would return to be a citizen, like everybody else.<sup>48</sup> This is not to say that any believer can be a minister, or everybody is a pastor. The shoemaker does not belong in the pulpit any more than the pastor should operate a lathe.<sup>49</sup> They have different tasks which belong to their God-given office, which for Luther could include state officials, but there is no question of the office of ministry being superior.<sup>50</sup> Luther emphasised that all the faithful have everything in Christ and are equal in dignity, calling, and privilege.

Many parallel lines of theology and practice can be traced between Luther and early Particular Baptists. Christology was the first principle in thinking about ministry in both. Church, and congregational ministry, is rooted in the ministry of Christ, and since every baptised believer is in Christ by faith, ministry is universal. Ministry is not about the status and office of the individual minister, but a practical necessity of the church which requires to be met, being by the congregation for the edification of the congregation. The text, 1 Peter 2, was important to both, since ministry was regarded as the sovereign gift of Christ to his people, each believer having the calling and privilege of service, since by baptism each is a priest.<sup>51</sup> The one caveat to this, however, concerned the ministry of women.<sup>52</sup> The ministry of women was not regarded in priestly terms, and their role in the congregation was limited to assisting deacons.<sup>53</sup> In a modern perspective this policy appears inconsistent at best, a capricious outworking of the doctrine of the universal priesthood.

In the Association Records of the Particular Baptists we gain an insight into the progress of Baptist lay ministry in the 1650s, its failures and

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<sup>48</sup> *Luther's Works* 36, 117; *Luther's Works* 44, 129.

<sup>49</sup> *Luther's Works* 44, 130.

<sup>50</sup> *Luther's Works* 44, 129.

<sup>51</sup> *Luther's Works* 39, 233.

<sup>52</sup> According to Luther, 'As preaching is a public matter, some people – women, children and other "unqualified persons" (untüchtige Leute) – are excluded straight away as unfit to hold any public office.' See Avis, *The Church in the Theology of the Reformers*, p. 106.

<sup>53</sup> Association Records of the Particular Baptists (ARPB), 11.

successes. In a letter from the Irish Baptists to their London counterparts in June 1653 we read of the intention to set aside one day every month to pray with fasting and mourning for the deficiency of ministry:

Our little sincere love to the Lord and his people and our little knowledge of the office and proper place of each member as God hath set him in the body of Christ, to the end that every particular member might be now effectually improved for the mutual edification of the whole.<sup>54</sup>

This quaint statement appears in the context of the Irish churches seeking greater effectiveness in the work of the Lord and believing this could be achieved by the mobilisation of the saints into the work of Christ. Further details about the Baptist causes in Ireland indicate that in Limerick the church was ‘in a decaying condition for want of able brethren to strengthen them’. From Galloway it was reported that the church, likewise, ‘have few able amongst them to edify the body’. Similar conditions existed in Wexford and Carrick Fergus.<sup>55</sup> The numerically small size, and ministerially weak condition, of some of the Irish churches gave impetus to the desire to see their theology of lay ministry become reality.

More positively, we read in the record of the Abingdon Association meeting at Tetsworth in 1659 that in a number of churches God was stirring up gifts of ministry among the congregation, notably at Stukleigh where ‘God hath drawne forth some gifts among them which formerly lay hid’.<sup>56</sup> In one region of the country, at least, the practice ministry in Baptist churches approximated to the theology of ‘universal priesthood’, but among emerging Particular Baptists ministry was no longer the preserve of a special class; there was no more a division between clergy and laity, only a division of function.

## **Baptist Practice of Calling to Ministry**

In 1656, the Abingdon Association in Oxfordshire asked the London church at Petty France<sup>57</sup> for their ‘judgements from scripture touching the trial, election, and ordination of elders and deacons’.<sup>58</sup> In the reply we have one of the fullest descriptions of ‘rules and grounds’ of early Baptist practice of appointing officers:

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<sup>54</sup> ARPB, 118-9.

<sup>55</sup> Details of all three churches are found in ARPB, 120.

<sup>56</sup> ARPB, 194.

<sup>57</sup> The history of this church is told in, T.E. Dowley, ‘A London Congregation during the Great Persecution: Petty France Particular Baptist Church, 1641-1688’, *Baptist Quarterly* 27.5 (January 1978), 233-239. The correspondence is briefly discussed in B.R. White, ‘The London Calvinistic Baptist Leadership 1644-1660’, *BQ Supplement* (1987), 34-45.

<sup>58</sup> ARPB, 170.

upon the trial and examination of the person's gifts and graces and endowments by scripture qualifications (after solemn seeking God for direction and assistance therein) she do solemnly signify by distinct acts upon each qualification, her approbation of the person or persons as being in some good measure fitted by the Lord and the most fit amongst them to serve the Lord and his people in the respective offices to which they are to be appointed. And then that she do by one single act of lifting up the hand, choose or elect the person or persons to the offices accordingly.<sup>59</sup>

In an accompanying letter, the London church outlined the process by which they had come to this procedure. The first principle was the biblical question, 'unto whom Christ Jesus had given such gifts as the fruit of his ascension for the gathering and edifying of his church': according to Ephesians 4.8-14, 'the church'. This, they conceded, could mean the universal church, but since Paul was writing to a particular congregation, they took it in this way. Thus the delegating of ministers and officers was a matter of local church responsibility.

The second principle was: 'by whose authority these gifts are orderly to be called forth unto their actual services and administration'. According to Acts 1.13-end, Acts 6.2-5, and Acts 14.23, they concluded that the Apostles had sought the advice of ordinary disciples about the 'trial, election and ordination' of those suitable to succeed to office and therefore the congregation should conduct the trying, electing and ordaining of ministers. Since the ascended Christ was present with his people by his Spirit, it was believed that Christ would direct his people to do his will in the choosing of ministers.

The third principle dealt with the question of whose authority is operative in the appointment of officers in the church. The answer was found in Acts 14, which described the choosing of elders in every church by raising hands, that is, by congregational election. To this practice they added the marginal note of Beza from the Geneva Bible:

Wherein we do agree with the *Paraphrase* of Beza, and others, upon the place, which is in these words: The apostles did not thrust the elders upon the churches through bribery or lordly superiority, but chose and placed them by the voice of the congregation.<sup>60</sup>

It appeared obvious to early Particular Baptists that *spiritual* ministers could not be imposed upon churches from above, by bishops, or presbyteries, or committees of 'Triers',<sup>61</sup> since, 'Christ hath placed the authority of trial and

<sup>59</sup> ARPB, 171.

<sup>60</sup> ARPB, 171. The words underlined were cited verbatim from the marginal notes in Beza's translation of the Bible, Acts 14.23, n.9. The marginal notes in the Geneva Bible were regarded with almost the same respect as scripture. See Christopher Hill, *Society and Puritanism in Pre-Revolutionary England* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1964), p. 18.

<sup>61</sup> On the role of the Triers see Jeffrey R. Collins, 'The Church Settlement of Oliver Cromwell', *History* 87 (2002), 18-40.

electing, viz., in his church'. Although some Presbyterians regarded the election of officers by the raising of hands among church members as extraordinary,<sup>62</sup> and argued that only Paul and Barnabas were involved in Acts 14,<sup>63</sup> among Separatists and Baptists it appeared obvious, and Apostolic.<sup>64</sup> To proceed to the appointment of officers by means other than this was to usurp the authority of King Jesus.

Early Baptist ecclesiology stressed the competence of the local gathered congregation to choose and appoint its own officers according to the ordinance of Christ, and the apostolic pattern. This looked very much like a policy of ministry from below, a theology of delegation and representation, ministry *by* the congregation *for* the congregation.

## Baptists and Ordination

One of the clearest statements about early Baptist ordination occurs in the letter from the Petty France church to the Abingdon Association in 1656, after the latter had sought advice about the appointment of ministers for their churches. The London congregation explained their practice:

we shall briefly lay down the rules by which we were guided in the matter of ordination. By ordination first, we mean, a separation or setting apart publicly and solemnly of the person (chosen as aforesaid by the power and authority of Christ in his church) by fasting and prayers, together with the laying on of hands by an orderly evangelist or eldership, where such as [*sic*] to be had or, in case of that defect, by such gifted brethren of the same congregation as may be called prophets and teachers, as those were, Acts 13.1. By all which you may perceive our judgement is, and accordingly was our practice, that the sole authority, as in trying, electing and ordering, so in ordaining, resides in the church (specially since the apostolical power is ceased) the reason being the same.<sup>65</sup>

The instructions of the Petty France church to the Abingdon Association were offered as advice and not a rule, their practice being commended, but not commanded, as a blessing and guidance of the Lord. Their importance, however, is that it was the model of ordination that other Baptist churches adopted, showing that there was a developing sense of common identity among Baptists in the 1650s, based on common practice among the churches,<sup>66</sup> and a number of features of the statement are worthy of note.

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<sup>62</sup> Edwards, *Reasons Against the Independent Government of Particular Congregations*, pp. 1-29.

<sup>63</sup> [Provincial Assembly], *Jus Divinum*, pp. 129-131.

<sup>64</sup> See the defence of this practice in the separatist circle of Katherine Chidley in K. Chidley, *The Justification of the Independent Churches of Christ* (London, 1641) p. 4.

<sup>65</sup> ARPB, 171.

<sup>66</sup> ARPB, 173.



First, that fasting and prayer was to accompany ordination was a sign of its 'weightiness', as well as conforming Baptist practice to scripture (Acts 13.3 and 14.23).

Second, the use of evangelists or elders to administer ordination was a practice that warranted further defence from London and primary in their consideration was that this was the Apostolic custom according to the example of Timothy and Titus,<sup>67</sup> who were appointed to the office of elder by Paul. Further, they argued that it helped to maintain order, since ordination from a baptised minister, or failing this, persons of approved wisdom, experience, gravity, and fidelity, meant the church and officers might understand fully their duties and authority.<sup>68</sup> Baptist sensitivities about this matter were no doubt due in part to how their ordination was perceived by outsiders.

Third, early Baptists regarded the practice of ordination as belonging to the *bene esse* of the church, not *esse*, a helpful practice of relative importance but not essential, ordination serving as a human recognition and validation of the ministry received from God.<sup>69</sup>

Fourth, ordination was an action of commissioning by the congregation, not requiring any special person to administer apostolic succession. In this regard, Baptists were influenced in their theology of ordination by the work of William Ames who, as early as 1614, had come to the view that true ordination was congregational not episcopal,<sup>70</sup> and argued that, 'no external means properly have the power to communicate grace to us in any real sense'. This meant that true spiritual ministry could not be received by succession from a Bishop or priest, for 'the Spirit bestows Christ and all his benefits on us.'<sup>71</sup>

Fifth, it was widely recognised that ordination was an ordinance of Christ still in force, and hence to be practised still, though no direct biblical reference was offered.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> 2 Timothy 1.6. Collier also referred to the practice of Timothy and Titus, 'The Right Constitution', 34. Luther had regarded Timothy and Titus as the original illustrations of how God's calling to Gospel ministry was received. See Gösta Hök, 'Luther's Doctrine of Ministry', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 7.1 (1954), p. 18.

<sup>68</sup> ARPB, 172.

<sup>69</sup> See the comment of Cromwell to Sir Walter Dundas, 'Approbation [i.e., ordination] is an act of conveniency in respect of order; not of necessity, to give faculty to preach the Gospel.' Cited in Richard L. Greaves, 'The Ordination Controversy and the Spirit of Reform in Puritan England', *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 21.3 (1970), 225-241 (p. 228).

<sup>70</sup> See Michael Watts, *The Dissenters I: From the Reformation to the French Revolution* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), p.61.

<sup>71</sup> See William Ames, *The Marrow of Theology*, trans. and ed. by John D. Eusden (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1997), p. 182.

<sup>72</sup> In the Directory for Ordination produced by the Westminster Divines, it was also stated that 'Ordination is always to be continued in the church, Tit. V. 1 Tim. V.21, 22.' See Robert Paul, *The Assembly of the*

Sixth, the manner of ordination was a matter of dispute, in particular whether it was necessary to employ laying on of hands.<sup>73</sup> Since ordination was the congregational affirmation of the gifting and calling of a believer to a particular ministry, it served a useful purpose of recognition, *jure humano*, and might be employed so long as there was no connotation of *jure divino*. The important element in the laying on of hands was the accompanying prayer which affirmed the inward and spiritual nature of the anointing for ministry. Thus, for Baptists even ordination did not supplant the idea of the common priesthood of all believers, since the special ministry of a pastor and preacher was rooted in the common calling all believers possess to use their Spirit-given gifts for the sake of the gospel.

## Conclusion

Early Baptist practices and theology of ministry were truly innovative for their time, and were bold, experimental, and biblical. They were an attempt to recreate the New Testament church, which involved bringing the congregation centre stage in the ordering of church affairs. Ministry was by the congregation and for the congregation, a reclaiming of the communal priesthood characteristic of the New Testament church. I wonder what challenges are posed by revisiting the practices and convictions of our forebears that might stimulate thinking about Baptist ministry as we move forward into the next era of the church. Have we become overly professionalised in our view of ministry, placing too much stress on formal state-sponsored qualifications? Is it possible that the doctrine of the communal priesthood has become a ‘dead letter in a clergy dominated institution’?<sup>74</sup> Are we preparing *all* God’s people for works of service or have we become elitist in our training and preparation for ministry, thereby guarding access to the channels of spiritual grace and divine favour? What is the future role of theological educators in the Baptist community across Europe? Revisiting the past is one way of reconsidering core values as we move into the future.

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*Lord: Politics and Religion in the Westminster Assembly and the ‘Grand Debate’* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1985), 329 n.88.

<sup>73</sup> Point 4, in the Presbyterian Directory, stated, ‘Every minister of the Word is to be ordained by the imposition of hands, and prayer, with fasting.’ Robert Paul, *The Assembly of the Lord*, 329 n.88.

<sup>74</sup> Gerrish, ‘Priesthood and the Ministry’, p. 404.

## Book Reviews

Kenyatta R. Gilbert, *A Pursued Justice: Black Preaching from the Great Migration to Civil Rights* (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2016), ISBN 978-1481303989

In this book the author seeks to identify a ‘tradition’ of prophetic preaching which can be located from the great Migration to the Civil Rights preaching of Martin Luther King Jr. and indeed beyond.

In the early chapters the author describes the ‘great Migration’ of Black people from the South of America to the Northern cities not least from 1917 onwards, the situation which they faced in the ‘Promised Land’ of the North, and one particular — not necessarily typical — expression of Black preaching, which he describes as a ‘prophetic’ response to the dire socio-economic situations they faced. He identifies this type of preaching with three particular representative figures: Reverdy Cassius Ransom (1861-1959), Florence Spearing Randolph (1866-1951), and Adam Clayton Powell Sr. (1865-1953). In contrast to other modes of Black preaching he claims that their preaching was ‘courageous’ and in the tradition of the Hebrew prophets as explicated by Walter Brueggemann. Such preaching unmasked and named the reality of Black people, offered hope in the salvation of God, linked words and action, and operated with ‘adorned’ beauty. In the later chapters he illustrates this preaching with reference to sermon texts from the above named preachers and later Civil Rights and post-Civil Rights preachers.

Gilbert helpfully and appropriately frames his exposition of prophetic Black preaching within the theological journey of the Exodus. He provides an introduction to a particular period of history in the experience of Black people, indicating the significance of the role of the Church in general and preaching in particular in the pursuit for justice. He delineates well the features of prophetic preaching. In so doing he posits such preaching as something that goes beyond political carping to offering transformative hope. His inclusion of Florence Spearing Randolph also brings an interesting and important dimension of critiquing gender discrimination into this account of ‘the prophetic Black homiletical mode’. In this way he demonstrates that such preaching was about ‘humanizing’ and not just race.

For all the many strengths of this work, the flow of the argument in the early chapters can be difficult to follow and the analysis of sermon texts is at times too descriptive and repetitive. I was also not fully convinced of

the author's appropriation of Paulo Freire, in that in this account it is the preacher rather than the people who name the situation. Such, however, is perhaps to be explained by the role of the preacher in the community. Nonetheless, this is an informative and at times inspirational book which in places is adorned with some of the rhetorical beauty which Gilbert attributes to others.

**Reviewed by Stuart Blythe**

Malkhaz Songulashvili, *Evangelical Christian Baptists of Georgia: The History and Transformation of a Free Church Tradition* (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2015), ISBN 978-1481301107

Malkhaz Songulashvili's volume on the history of Georgian Evangelical Christian Baptists (later in this review: Baptists) is a significant addition to the field of Eastern European evangelical research. The book argues that Georgian Baptists, in their witness, benefitted from deeper integration with Georgian ethnic and cultural values. This, consequently, leads towards worship, spirituality, and church governance that moves closer towards Georgian Orthodox patterns.

The first two hundred pages of the volume focus on the historical narrative of Baptists in Georgia, moving from Tsarist times to the Post-Soviet era. Songulashvili emphasises that Russian-speaking and Georgian-speaking Baptist stories are parallel but not fully identical developments. According to the author, the latter is more rooted in local culture. Pages 225-337 describe recent changes in the concept and practice of mission and evangelism (covering a period approximately from 1990 to 2010) among Georgian Baptists. These included a radical shift towards liturgical renewal, developing a positive view of the Orthodox 'other', increased Baptist activity in the social and political realms, use of arts, such as Baptist iconography, and other elements.

A valuable extra feature of this research consists of 17 appendices that the reader may find from pages 340-430. These English translations of primary documents help to throw light on the Georgian Baptist story. Until now, some of these documents have not been available for a wider audience of English readers. The time span covered by the documents ranges from 1879 to 2013. The older documents touch upon the aspects of early Georgian Baptist life and worship. The more recent materials, such as 'The Liturgical Vision of the Evangelical Baptist Church of Georgia' and others, assist in

understanding the Georgian Baptist efforts to enliven sacramental-liturgical spirituality and mission.

The Georgian Baptist recent reforms, with an aim to contextualise their witness and mission, no doubt need further research and reflection. The story in this volume has been told predominantly from the point of view of the author, who strongly endorsed and implemented the reforms. However, future scholars will probably ask additional questions: In what ways did the local churches and church members perceive the changes? What was the international reaction to the 'Georgian Baptist experiment'? How should one evaluate, from a long-term perspective, the results of the 'transformation of a free church tradition' (using the words from the sub-title of the book)? Was the ecumenical co-operation at the turn of the millennium an interlude, or will this thematic motif be taken into the future of Georgian church life?

**Reviewed by Toivo Pilli**

Michael E. Williams, Sr. (ed.) *Witnesses to the Baptist Heritage: Thirty Baptists Every Christian Should Know* (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 2015), ISBN 978-0881465488

This is a book of short stories: thirty biographical sketches, each six to eight pages in length. The editor's stated aims are to convince the reader of the significance of each Baptist included and to whet the reader's appetite to explore the characters in more depth, using the reading lists at the end of each chapter. The sub-title suggests a further aim being to raise the profile and significance of Baptists across the wider Christian world.

The character studies are presented in chronological order, from Thomas Helwys (c.1575-c.1614) to Gardner Taylor (1918-2015). The best-known Baptists such as Spurgeon, Carey and Oncken are here, but also lesser-known ones like Lott Carey and Nannie Burroughs. The editor hopes to reach 'the non-scholarly reader but still provide aid for further research for more scholarly readers' and the writing style and format of the book help achieve this goal. Thus the detailed chapter notes are placed at the end of the book rather than as academic-style page footnotes.

There is no formula for each chapter and so the authors explore aspects of the characters in terms of their contribution to Baptist history and identity, rather than mechanically tracing their life stories. This leads to the (admittedly, rather brief) opening up of a variety of topics that continue to concern Baptists today, such as freedom of conscience, preaching, mission, and social justice issues of racial and gender equality. The main limitation of

this very readable book, as acknowledged in its Introduction, lies in confining its focus to North American (twenty one) and British (eight) Baptists, with only Johann Oncken from Europe and no other nationalities included. The book would therefore be best read alongside others, such as Ian Randall's *Communities of Conviction*, to gain a broader perspective on Baptist identity in Europe and the Middle East. In addition, this highlights the importance of Baptist scholars continuing to document stories of 'witnesses to the Baptist heritage' across the wider world.

**Reviewed by Dorothy McMillan**

John Inscore Essick, *Thomas Grantham: God's Messenger from Lincolnshire* (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 2013), ISBN 978-0881464610

It is good to have scholarly work being done on the early General Baptists, since much more attention has been given to early Particular Baptists. As well as John Inscore Essick's volume, which illuminates Grantham's life, we have the study by Clint Bass, *Thomas Grantham (1633-1692) and General Baptist Theology* (2013). Grantham was one of the most significant Baptist figures of the seventeenth century. Inscore Essick provides a comprehensive guide to Grantham's extensive writing. He analyses the place of Grantham as a leader within the General Baptist community in England, particularly in Lincolnshire and Norfolk. The chapter looking at Grantham as a Messenger, a crucial ministerial position among General Baptists, takes further the work of John Nicholson, which was published in the *Baptist Quarterly* in 1958. This chapter argues convincingly that Grantham helped to establish the office of Messenger by writing in defence of this office, and by preaching, baptising people, planting Baptist congregations, and ordaining ministers.

In his chapter on 'Great Debates', Inscore Essick shows the way in which Grantham interacted with Anglicans, Catholics, Quakers, and Presbyterians as an apologist for Baptist beliefs. The debates are vividly brought to life, although it could be argued that Grantham's approach was not quite as ecumenical as Inscore Essick seems to suggest. Finally, there is a chapter on Grantham and the government. Grantham's position here was strategic: he represented the baptised believers of Lincolnshire before Charles II at least twice, seeking fair rather than unjust treatment for them. It was important for Grantham that Baptists should be loyal and peaceable subjects, and he did not hesitate to put the Baptist case to the king and was committed to explaining his position in writing, in his outstanding work of

systematic theology, *Christianismus Primitivus*, and in a focused way in *The Loyal Baptist*.

I welcome this book as the best introduction to Grantham. For a theological analysis of Grantham, Bass' work is the place to turn. What Inscore Essick has done is to place Grantham firmly in his context. The book contains a wealth of detail, makes excellent use of primary sources, is very well produced and has helpful maps and appendices. I was slightly puzzled by the cover, which is a beautiful watercolour of Lincoln Cathedral. Given Grantham's determined Nonconformity, the explanation has to be that this is a representation of the Established Church from which Grantham dissented.

**Reviewed by Ian Randall**